CAPTAIN REDLEGS

Sabra Conner

Captain Redlegs

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SABRA CONNER

THE QUEST OF THE
SEA OTTER

ON SWEETWATER
TRAIL

CAPTAIN REDLEGS

BY

SABRA CONNER

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CAPTAIN REDLEGS

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CONTENTS

Book One—The "Friend's Adventure"

CHAPTER	PAGE
I—Ronald Goes Hunting	3
II—Hugh Greaves Goes to War	13
III—The "Friend's Adventure"	20
IV—The Voyage	33
V—The Slave Auction	39

Book Two—Beholden

I—The MacAllstar	51
II—The New Prophet	64
III—Death of a Prophet	73
IV—Penne's Wife	79
V—Charms	87
VI—Obeah	97
VII—Waunica	106
VIII—Escape	115

Book Three—The "Azure Rood"

I—The "Sancta Madre"	123
II—The Fight on the Galleon	145
III—The Cabin of the "Rey Philippe"	162
IV—Doña Rosita	174
V—The Isle of Pearls	182
VI—The Capture of the Fleet	194

CHAPTER PAGE

VII—Our Lady of Roses 203
VIII—Revenge 212
IX—Redlegs Sails Away 221

Book Four—Monsieur Lanor Severg

I—Nevis 227
II—Re-enter Tiger Baldwin 236
III—The Menace 246
IV—Chateau Rien 253
V—Old Dreams 261
VI—High Bindon Comes to Nevis . . 273
VII—Delivered from the Pit 288
VIII—The "Rose of Galway" . . . 296
IX—Homeward, Ho! 304
X—"Home Is the Hunter" 311

BOOK ONE

The "Friend's Adventure"

Captain Redlegs

CHAPTER I

RONALD GOES HUNTING

A BOY rode by the river, singing. The sun shone gold on the cuckoo buds in the meadows, and lark and mavis filled the air with such carollings that it mattered little to Ronald Greaves that his hunting companions had disappeared. He sang blithely as any bird.

> "What shall he have who killed the deer?
> His leather hide and horns to wear.
> What shall he have who killed the deer
> When home the hide and horns we bear?
> The horn, the horn, the lusty, lusty horn!"

The boy rode his dapple grey along the broad waterway, seeking a ford so that he might come at the inviting forest glades that crowned the uplands beyond the English border.

"Nay, Bess, my pretty, we'll delay no longer; what fear we a touch of dampness? In with ye!"

With much snorting, and pretty display of fright, the grey mare waded in and breasted the stream stoutly. On the far side, after a great ado about shaking the water from her coat, she was soon pacing the woodlands.

This riding of the English north country was not without danger, as Ronald well knew. Word had come of Roundhead troops marching north to wipe out the last stronghold of Royalism. As he thought of the war the boy's face lost its merry look; but when, with a crashing of branches, a tall red deer bounded across his trail, all but joy in the chase left his mind, and he and Grey Bess took up the hunt joyously.

Hours later, having lost the stag in a network of rocky glens, Ronald came following a hill burn down to a well-traveled highway. A tramping as of many feet sounded from beyond a wooded turn, and at the sound the boy plunged across the road into a clump of thick-leaved alders by the brook. Peering from this shelter he watched, presently, troops of steel-helmeted, stern-faced men file by.

"They go to take Carlisle," he muttered. "Sniveling Shaved Heads!"

Then, in spite of his hatred, Ronald found himself moved by the serious set face, the deadly business-like manner of each brown-clad soldier who plodded through the dust of the road. Not thus had his scholarly father looked when *he* had ridden away to fight for the king. With a gay scarf blowing in the wind, his plumed hat waving so that the sunshine fell on his fair long curls, Sir Hugh Greaves had sent a gay laugh back to his

wife and two young sons. Then, with a song on his lips, he had taken the hill road and had never returned. Ronald could still hear in memory that lilting refrain,

> "Ride, ride for the King, for the Church,
> Ride, ride for the King!"

The boy found something implacable, irresistible about the brown plodding troops in the high-road before him. He knew that they could fight well. Since Naseby, they had poured across the broad midlands so that little of England was now left to the King's friends.

"There be two ways of fighting, then," mused Ronald, as he held Grey Bess by the nostrils lest she betray their hiding place. "There's the dour way, like these Shaved Heads; and there's the gay, like the King's men. Ah, well! I'll aye choose to fight with a laugh and a song like the gallant Cavaliers of the King, God bless him, whatever foe I ha' to meet." The boy snatched off his bonnet and waved it as the last horseman clattered over the bridge and spurred to the head of the troopers. This was a long-faced man with grizzled hair. Ronald little thought how soon he was to see again that long visage with its high-bridged nose and stern eyes.

Soon the boy was leading Grey Bess beside the stream into a pleasant dale where she might crop

long grass. On the crown of a gentle rise the roof of a great country house could be seen above a grove of oak trees. Worn out by his long ride, Ronald lay half dozing in the shade. He chanted softly.

"And more to lull him in his slumber soft
A trickling stream from high rock tumbling down,
And ever drizzling rain upon the loft
Mixt with a murmuring wind much like the sound
Of swarming bees did cast him in a swound . . . "

The hunter slept. Presently he awakened sufficiently to brush from his nose one of the swarming bees which troubled his dream. Still it persistently crawled about his face and he finally uttered a drowsy but emphatic imprecation. A chime like fairy bells rang in his ears and he came erect to find himself face to face with a laughing wee maid, whose raised hand still held the long meadow grass which had tickled his nose. Quite unabashed she folded her hands in her lap and prinked her red lips reprovingly.

"Nay, now, thee must not use such words. Peggy would say thou art a pig-sticking Scotsman."

"So, ho! A pig-sticker! And who may you be, my lady fair, who dares to rouse a Scotsman in his den?"

"I am Lady Janice Carlysle, and I live in yon house."

Her dress of fine silk with its rare lace collar, and her dainty shoes, which showed the results of her long walk, proclaimed her quality.

"Bad Peggy would not give me time to play in the park, so I came by my lone self to gather maiden smocks and cuckoo buds by the burn side."

Her explanation was offhand, careless. Her dark hair, like a little cap, curled close to a small head which was carried on a slim neck so straight that even at eight years Janice Carlysle had a look of arrogance. Her wide eyes were unexpectedly blue within dark lashes, the soft blue of the morning sky after a night of rain.

"It grieves me that I sounded like a pig-sticking Scot," said Ronald gravely to this vision. "My father was a very gentle scholar and he rode beside the Randolphs and Carlysles for the King."

"I like you." The little lady examined the lad's thin, high-bred face with its humorous eyes. "If you are a scholar then you know ballads. Tell me one."

Ronald bowed with great seriousness. "A request from a lady fair is a command. Do but permit me to recline at ease once more and I will tell you a wondrous lovely tale of a lady so fair and so good that when 'A ramping lion rushed upon her suddenly, the sight amazed him and he licked her lily hands with fawning tongue.' "

Then, while Janice Carlysle's blue eyes grew large with excitement, Ronald chanted in verse, or paraphrased freely where his memory failed, the story of the Red Cross Knight and

> "The lovely lady rode him fair beside
> And by her in a line a milk white lamb she had."

When he had ended the tale about the fight with the evil monster, the small maid demanded still more stories about the lovely lady.

"But it's far to the border and a league beyond that to High Bindon. Even though I ride fast I can scarce be at home by star time. I dare say, moreover, that Peggy is even now searching the park for your own self."

"Will you be my Red Cross Knight?" Janice asked, her mind still on the tale.

"I'll gladly serve you, next to the King," said the young Cavalier, "if you will but promise to slip through this hedge into the park and hurry to the castle, and promise never to come to the high-road again without your Peggy."

"I have no red cross for you to wear on a shield," continued Janice. "Would a little blue one to wear about your neck do, think you, sir?"

She unsnapped a fine gold chain about her neck and gave to Ronald a tiny cross of blue enamel inlaid with gold flowers.

" 'Twill be a fine token," said the lad, accepting

it gravely as he knelt on one knee in front of her, while she stood very straight before him.

"Will you keep this seal of mine as a token also, Lady Janice? It bears, you see, the Greaves coat on a cairngorm, a broken fetter. Our motto, 'We break bonds.' " He gave into her tiny hand a ring with a glinting cairngorm crystal engraved with a broken fetter.

Lady Janice gave Ronald her hand, and her blue eyes shone upon him sweetly as she answered earnestly, "I will keep it until you claim it, Sir Knight. And I will wait at home until you come there."

Ronald watched her across the park before he started to follow the stream down to the river which formed the Scottish border.

Grey Bess, refreshed by her nooning, galloped across the woodlands, but Ronald's adventures were not finished. As he skirted an oak grove he heard a woman's shrill screams coming from a cottage that stood near the highroad which he was avoiding.

Without thought, but obeying his natural impulse, Ronald swerved Grey Bess and rode quickly to the front of the hut. Here he found, confronting him with leveled musket, one of the Roundhead soldiers. As the boy halted, chagrined at being caught by the very troopers he had taken pains to

avoid, two other soldiers came from the hut, dragging a wasted skeleton of a man whose wife, still screaming, followed and flung herself before the soldiers.

"Oh, masters, 'tis death to drag him away to the gaols and himself but holden to life by a hair. He ha' na' touched his hammer this se'n month."

"Had the rascal stayed in his smithy and not taken arms against the Lord's anointed, he had been a well man to-day, and would not have been in danger of sentence to the Islands."

These soldiers were a part of the troopers that Ronald had watched marching along the highway, and they had been sent to round up Royalists.

"Well, my fine cockerel?" The dour-faced trooper with the musket accosted Ronald.

"What good can it be to drag such a sick one from his home? He is like to die of coughing sickness any day." Indignant remonstrance was in Ronald's tone. He had, too, the air of one accustomed to being obeyed, but the trooper was not one to be daunted by such a tone.

"Now, I doubt not yourself do be a Royalist," he declared, shrewdly looking over the boy's velvet suit and flowing fair hair.

"And if—" The boy began with the fierce heat of one who resented questioning from an underling, but a second sense, a spirit of caution, came

to him in time. His teeth clicked shut on the defiant admission of the Royalist sympathies he had started to utter.

"It is clear that I am no fighter. I belong over the border."

"And if ye had stayed over the border ye had been wiser by far, little man. Now, I bethink me, I shall just take ye in along wi' yon renegade for the Captain to be questioning. Down wi' ye." The trooper started to shift his musket to cover more accurately the lad, whose quiet seat on the horse had indicated no resistance.

"Down yourself, Crop Head!" At a touch of the lad's heels Grey Bess reared in the trooper's face, waving her forelegs menacingly. Startled, the trooper sprang back, lost his balance, and fell heavily. The musket, jarred from his grasp, flew to a distance of several feet from the discomfited Roundhead.

Grey Bess, at a jerk on her rein, pivoted on her trim heels and flew around the hut and away among the oaks of the wood.

The boy was elated at the success of his first brush with these hated soldiers of the stern Puritan army. He tossed his head and laughed. Later, however, as he thought back over the events of the day, a sense of foreboding came over him. These men were like the tenacious hounds that

some men made use of to track the deer. They never gave up a trail once set upon. Those certainly laughed best who laughed last at the Puritan troopers. Ronald shivered, and then chirruped cheerfully to Grey Bess.

CHAPTER II

HUGH GREAVES GOES TO WAR

IT had long been starshine when Grey Bess galloped down the road which led through the village of High Bindon. The hall on the knoll above the straggling fisher village by the sea blazed with lights. Ronald rode fast, for he feared his long absence had brought worry to his mother, Lady Joan Greaves. The squat tower of the little Norman church marked the end of the village, and the boy became aware of a crowd of village lads bivouacked on the church green. He slowed enough in his headlong pace to hear Ned Abstone shout, "Ay, Master Ronald, be ye in that tearing hurry to go along to the war wi' we?"

The boy's heart beat high with excitement when, bathed and dressed in fine fresh linen, he came into the hall where Lady Joan sat in a tall chair, consulting with her guest, Mr. Ralph Glendenning, pastor of the church. For three years past Ronald's mother had spent hours every day in the dim sanctuary of the little church, in prayer for her soldier husband. No friend was dearer at High Bindon than the pastor.

Lady Joan received Ronald lovingly, but with an air of preoccupation, and continued her conversation. Hugh Greaves, now twenty, with his father's blond beauty and the fine man-of-the-world air the university had given him, joined in the talk.

The pastor was a militant, as ardent for the King and Church as any Puritan was for the reform. He was a man of about forty, built like an ox, sturdy, square, and implacable. He had long been urging Lady Joan to consent to his raising a company in High Bindon to ride to the support of the King.

"Now is the crisis," urged Hugh, his clear voice ringing with boyish zeal. "Every man will count at Carlisle, and he who helps the King now will be the King's friend later. He will not forget the loyal Scots, Mother."

"Yes, my Lady," urged Ralph Glendenning, "the Church and the gentry must stand against this Antichrist or be swept entirely away. The Church's salvation is now at stake."

"You are right, I think," said Lady Joan, taking Ronald's hand and holding it tightly. "Your father would wish you to go, too, Hugh. I trust you, Mr. Glendenning, as a leader of the troops that we can equip. You are a man of God and a leader of men. I am proud to send Sir Hugh with you."

"And I—" Ronald breathlessly broke in, unable to remain silent longer. "I can sometimes wind Hugh with the sword, and I can ride far better than Ned Abstone. I go, also!"

"Nay, not both of you at once," replied Lady Joan, her small delicate face aquiver with the pain of memory. "You are but fourteen, Ronald, if that you are large, almost, as Hugh. Wait with me yet for a year or two; then, perchance, I must give you also to my King."

Ronald swallowed his disappointment with a smile, for all hearts at High Bindon loved Lady Joan Greaves, and her least wish was law.

Glendenning sought to comfort the boy for this disappointment. "I cannot think, Ronald, that you have the vocation for war. Yes, I know your wrist is supple and your body is tireless, though so young. Physically you are fitted. But there is another, a spiritual attribute that you lack, my son. A hardness of temper that cares only for the end and can ignore hideous means. You are a scholar in spirit and feeling, lad, not a warrior. Life may teach you that tempered steel has its place and its need, but the gentle learning I have had such joy in instilling into your sensitive nature has not done it."

"I pray life may not do it!" Lady Joan was a loyal woman but her loss had left her a sad one.

"Oh, if only the Prince may come to the throne and this hideous war be over before Ronald must go out to learn the game of death."

"It will be over soon, Lady Joan. Hugh and I will hasten the day. It may be we can keep our poet lad undefiled by war." Glendenning was the warrior type but he smiled lovingly at the boy.

"I stay because my mother bids, sir. But—if life would destroy poetry, then so much the worse for learning. Life is the thing for any man to try. I'll be a man, sir, before I'll be a scholar. Hardness! One must have a shell to protect the sweet."

So it was that Ronald watched his brother Hugh ride away with Mr. Ralph Glendenning at the head of a troop of soldiers who were but yesterday fisher lads. They, too, sang as they rode,

"Ride, ride for the King, for the Church."

It was by moonlight, ten days later, that Ralph Glendenning lurched back down the hills to High Bindon with a remnant of the village lads. They did not sing as they rode and the lads hastily scattered to the cottages from certain of which wailing cries arose.

Glendenning came to Lady Joan where she stood awaiting his news. She leaned heavily on Ronald's arm in the shadowy hall. She listened in silence as Glendenning told of the fall of Carlisle to the Roundhead troops and of Hugh Greaves' broken

body which had been left with the King's dead, so hard pressed had the fugitives been. Most of the village lads were even now lying out in the hills, and he, the leader, must join them, for the troopers were near at hand.

"Nay, Mr. Glendenning, you have served the King and my house loyally, and my house shall serve you now." Lady Joan allowed no sign of the sorrow that tore her heart to appear while the living needed her hospitality and care. "You shall lie safe in the secret chamber beneath this hall until the Roundheads have come and gone. 'Tis a safe hiding place and a snug one. None know of it but Sir Ronald and me."

As his mother gave him for the first time the title that his brother's death had left to him, Ronald felt her slim form quiver against his side.

Within the hour Glendenning lay safe in a fair chamber beneath the hearth of the great hall and from its slit window he watched the road to the village.

Down from the hills at dawn rode the brown troopers, seeking the refugees from Carlisle. The fisher lads were away in their boats and the farm boys lay hidden in the hills.

When the stern-faced, long-nosed captain, whom Ronald had watched on a day from a leafy covert, came to the hall seeking the leader of the Cavalier

troops, he received little satisfaction from Lady Joan Greaves. She thought she had sounded the depths of sorrow.

"Mr. Glendenning led my son into battle, but he did not bring him back. You need not ask for Mr. Glendenning of me," she said.

"That be an evasion of the truth. I know you lying papists," the Puritan's voice was harsh with the hatred of fanaticism. "Even the babes would lie to protect this renegade priest."

In spite of his mother's detaining hand, Ronald flung himself forward. "Don't dare to tell my mother she lies! Find your preacher if you can, but only a coward makes war on such as my mother."

Stern fanatical eyes drilled into the boy's angry face.

"My fine bantling, it be high time your comb be trimmed! 'Unto the fourth generation shall the Lord's wrath be visited.' Find me the traitor priest or I shall carry you in his stead to Carlisle for judgment."

"He is but a child of fourteen! He has never carried arms. Indeed, you cannot hold him for treason!" Lady Joan's anxiety sharpened her voice. Ronald's grey eyes caught her dark ones and held them. Repudiation, agony, final acceptance spoke in hers.

"High Bindon be a foul traitor's nest, nought else," the harsh voice droned on as mother and son held silent communion. "Two Greaves have fought and died for the foolish and loose-living man whom you call king. Soon this young lordling will be carrying sword against the protector of the true Church. Come now! I'll have priest or lord, I care not which—or both. We will scotch this rebellion here, now!"

"Nay, Mother, worry not so!" Ronald was answering his mother's eyes. "I have nought to fear at Carlisle, for my hands are free from war. Fret not, dear mother. I must, you see, go with them now. I will come back to you."

Lady Joan Greaves, her eyes wide with fear and grief, but her head held high, nodded. The Greaves could not give up the fugitive who lay in sanctuary beneath their feet. She stood in the hall door as Ronald rode away a prisoner with the brown-clad troops. He waved his red-plumed bonnet and sent her a gay laugh as Grey Bess climbed the hill path.

It was many years before Ronald Greaves again entered the hall door of High Bindon. Lady Joan's hair was snow white then, but her head was still held high and her dark eyes were wide with an agony of love when Sir Ronald at last came home.

CHAPTER III

THE "FRIEND'S ADVENTURE"

THE frigate, *Friend's Adventure*, swung gently at her moorings as Ronald Greaves climbed with fettered hands up the ladder to her cluttered deck and looked across at the tall figure of Captain Robert Baldwin, who leaned over the rail of the quarter-deck as he watched the loading of the hundred wretched prisoners who were to be the most valuable part of his cargo. His narrowed eyes held a look of cat-like pleasure, for Captain Baldwin—Tiger Baldwin—was one who by nature hated the unfortunate.

As Ronald paused for one last look at the far blue hills where nested High Bindon, Baldwin growled across the deck.

"Slam those cattle into the hold! Tide's turned. Shove them in, else we lie here all night."

A great hand pushed Ronald and only his agility with his loosely bound hands saved him from broken limbs on the deck below.

The semblance of a trial before the captain of the Covenanters had not cleared the boy from the charge of treason. The long-faced trooper who

had taken him prisoner from High Bindon had testified that the boy had used treasonous language. His very bearing, which boyish pride made arrogant, worked against him. He had admitted that he was Sir Ronald Greaves of High Bindon, and that his father and brother had died fighting for the King. He even added the unnecessary truth that, had his mother permitted, he would have fought beside Sir Hugh. That settled his fate. The judge sternly reproved this pride of class.

"What England needs most is to rid herself of this papist gentry," he pronounced. "We'll send this lordling to the Islands to sweat out his pride and treason. Like Sodom and Gomorrah shall the fire consume the pest holes of the scarlet woman."

Stunned, and unable to understand at once what the sentence meant, Ronald had been led away to Morecambe Bay, where the *Friend's Adventure* was loading a dolorous cargo for Barbados.

Now, as the boy straightened himself in the narrow space where his head barely cleared the floor above him, and caught his first breath of the air already reeking with odors from the miserable humans, outscourings of the Puritan gaols, he realized for the first time that life, the old, clean, orderly life of High Bindon, had crashed about him.

He shook with a deadly chill, like a wild thing in

a trap; and like a trapped creature he almost yielded to the impulse to lash about in blind fury, to kill or be killed at once. Perhaps he had yielded to this panic had not a thin-faced man, who stood peering from a tiny porthole, suddenly begun to curse in a shrill, high-pitched voice which rose to a maniacal shrieking, then ended in a sudden ghastly choking as he dropped face down on a pile of filthy rags.

Ronald, quieted by another's terror, threw back his head and achieved a shaky laugh which was almost a sob. That boyish laugh, however, cast a sudden spell of quiet over the swearing, mumbling wretches in the darkness about him.

"What kind of fool laughs in hell?" A brawny hand spun the boy about so that the light from the small port fell upon his high-bred young face and the fair curls falling over his shoulders.

" 'Tis a lad of the gentry. Mayhap his mind be touched," muttered the big man.

Ronald laughed again, this time with a surer note and in the easy Greaves manner.

"Nay, my mind's my own. I choose but to laugh at this sorry jest life has played us. As to that, a curse gets us no better fare."

"Aye, well—" began the big man, when the choking man on the pile of rags again staggered to the window, gasping for air. Ronald saw, to

his horror, that this one's clothes were covered with bright, red blood. He sprang to hold the thin form upright and recognized the cottager whom he had seen dragged away by the Covenanters on the day of the hunt.

"You must lie down and rest quiet." Ronald gave the order as naturally as he would have to one of the fisher lads of High Bindon, and the man let himself be helped back to his bed of rags.

"Best let 'un dee at once, 'ud be kinder," came a voice from the darkness. "When us gets a-pitchin' in a stiff gale, more'n Jock 'ull dee in this rat's hole."

"Aye, may their bloody bones rot, as they lie broken-backed in hell, the sniveling psalm-singers!" came another, harsher, voice. "As for us 'uns, our bones 'ull soon be picked by the fishes."

"Nay, stop that useless cursing and help me hold this sick man," ordered Ronald, as the ship, moving with the outgoing tide, began to pitch and roll, throwing the sick man against the timbers.

"Big Jem 'ull hold him," offered the first man who had spoken to Ronald, pushing the boy gently aside as he began to care for Jock.

"Nay, young sir, vex not yoursel' over I," gasped the sick man to Ronald. "I be but a bag o' bones at best since the wound in my side at the war. I ha' had my last look at my wee bairns and

the bonny woodlands. Naught cares Jock when he pulls his last breath."

In an abomination of smell and sound where seasick wretches rolled, Ronald spent that night beside Jem, caring for dying Jock Smith, who had fought for the king. It was well for the boy that his hands and heart were busy caring for the wasted man. Toward morning he slept a bit, uneasily, to be awakened by a harsh voice at the opened hatch.

"Get up out of that, ye faking swine. Half of ye get mess amidships whiles the rest scrub out your sty."

A dash was made for the ladder, but Ronald's clear voice halted the strugglers at the opening.

"Stop! Lift Jock Smith to the air."

"Aye," echoed big Jem, "stand back, my hearties, and let Jock get his last breath under the sky, like a man. Here he go!"

He heaved the wasted bulk in his huge-muscled arms and lightly climbed the ladder to the deck.

"Up wi' the little Laird, next," cried a farmer lad, lifting Ronald halfway up the ladder while holding back the crowd with his own body. Then the others poured out of the fetid hole till the mate stopped the rush and ordered the unfortunates still below to flush out the between decks.

Morning shone across a purple sea unmarked by

land. Ronald cast his eyes about the circle of the horizon. The sails made a steady murmur as of a mountain burn. The cool morning wind, after the heated foulness below, was like a clean bath. It made them all shiver, and it set Jock Smith into a fit of choked coughing. Blood poured from his mouth as he lifted himself on one elbow to look back toward England. As he dropped to the deck his eyes turned to Ronald, who knelt beside him.

"My wee bairns 'ull be eatin' their porridge, now." The breath rattled in his throat.

"Fling that filthy carcass over the rail!" the Captain ordered.

Ronald was watching Jock's wistful eyes and the Captain's order had not reached his mind when two seamen, catching Jock by the knees and shoulders, had heaved his wasted form to the rail.

"Stop!" The boy's word was so authoritative that the sailors paused.

Ronald held them by one outstretched hand and faced the Captain, who leaned over the quarter-deck rail.

"He's alive! You dare not be such a brute!" Horror rang in the boy's voice.

Hand on rail, the Captain sprang over and down, landing as lightly as a big cat on the deck. One hand closed in a crushing grip on Ronald's shoulder. His narrow eyes gleamed.

"Over!" He glanced at the sailors who hastily loosed their hold on Jock Smith.

That spark of fire that ever smoulders in the Gael burst into flames in Ronald Greaves' breast. His body became a vibrant tool, the blade of his spirit. He slipped from the crushing grip and flew in the Captain's face. He slid like quicksilver from the grasping arms and swarmed around and onto the great shoulders, gripping like a weasel at a vixen's throat. Clawing at this suddenly mad thing that tore at his hair and eyes and throat, Baldwin slipped in a pool of Jock Smith's blood and rolled on the deck, while roars of laughter broke from his amazed crew and the prisoners. Even the sea-sick ones forgot their pangs in savage joy.

"At him, little Laird!" cried one.

"Score for the Laugher," bawled Jem.

Then silence fell again, for in a moment it was all over. Tiger Baldwin had regained his feet with that cat-like agility his bulk made so unexpected. He came up grasping Ronald's ankles and he swung the slight form around in a great circle, then let go. Had the boy slammed into the scuppers, as the Tiger intended, he had been smashed like an egg. A great coil of rope broke the force with which he slid across the deck and served as a buffer. Even so, he lay unconscious.

The Captain's eyes scorched the crew. "Truss

him up and dip him from the jib. Be smart, mister, or I'll smart you." This to the mate, who bawled for a line and tied the boy like a pig ready for the spit.

Again on the quarter-deck, Baldwin watched with slit eyes. Jem cursed softly and leaned, very sick, by the rail. Two long ropes extended from the bundle that was Ronald Greaves' body. The second mate, holding the ropes, ran out on the jib boom ropes and dropped the bundle into the sea. With this boom for a lever the mate dipped and lifted the boy from the water that foamed away from the keel. The cold water had revived Ronald at the first touch. He realized that he must fill his lungs in the moment allowed him in the air. How long the dipping continued, the boy never knew. The farmer lad hung over the rail, weeping, as the soggy bundle lifted and dipped. All believed that he must be drowned when the Captain called, "Now keelhaul the brat!"

Well was it for the little Laird of High Bindon that his summers had been spent with fisher lads swimming the breakers on the shoals. The second mate took one rope and ran along the rail. The boatswain, with the other rope, ran along the opposite rail, so that one rope passed under the bottom of the driving ship, and began to haul the boy beneath the keel. Realizing what was going to

happen, Ronald filled his aching lungs and, as he was dragged beneath the ship, used every muscle to swim with the rope, head downward, moving his body vigorously though arms and legs were bound. As he felt the keel upon his back he struggled faintly upward, but the breath left his lungs in a gasp at last and he swallowed salt water.

Again Ronald lay unconscious on the deck, his clothes and his flesh torn by the barnacled keel.

The Captain eyed the miserable form grimly. Jem knelt beside Ronald and began to untie the sodden ropes. The prisoners, refreshed by the breeze, had lined up for their tin of tea and soggy biscuit. As Jem worked at the ropes, he lifted the boy so that the salt water ran from his mouth. He pulled the arms from the ropes and pumped them up and down until the boy groaned. At this sign of life the Tiger's eyes gleamed. The farmer boy brought his tin of tea and poured it down Ronald's throat, carefully.

"Stand him up or pitch him over!" It was the menacing growl of the Captain.

Brawny Jem helped Ronald gently to his feet and steadied him. The boy was aching in every bone. His body was scratched and bleeding, his head roared from the pressure of forced breathing, but his will refused to let his legs crumple beneath him. He threw back his head in the gallant

Greaves manner and his eyes met the gleam beneath the Captain's slit lids. Ronald knew that Tiger Baldwin would never forget the moment when he had rolled on his own deck amid the roars of his own seamen; nor would he ever forgive the one who had so humiliated him.

Baldwin's eyes flashed wide open with amazement when from the bedraggled brat on his deck came a laugh. Then a voice, drawling and deliberate, if somewhat weak and choked, came from the slim figure standing so painfully erect.

" 'Tis time for a gentleman's son to die when such a brute rules his world. Come, my man, pitch me over and finish your job!"

Jem made a gesture of helplessness. Why try to save this crazed one?

"Not so easy, my little gentleman. Not so easy a death as that." The Captain's voice was choked also. Rage gave it the spitting squawl of an angry lynx. "Lash him to the mast!"

The mate and the boatswain caught the boy and roped him to the mainmast with the same rope Jem had torn off but a moment since. Baldwin came slowly, step by step, down the ladder. He took a cat-o'-nine-tails from the mate. He shook its rawhide thongs until they snapped. His eyes gloated.

The farmer boy flung himself on his face by the

rail. Jem clenched his great fists for a blow on the Captain's blunt chin. The Tiger's eyes caught the movement. He nodded to the mate and Jem found his arms caught and twisted behind him. As he struggled he heard the first blow fall and saw the convulsive stiffening of the thin body.

"Laugh now, gentleman's brat!" The Tiger's voice nerved Jem to a tremendous effort. He flung aside the first mate and then the boatswain and seized the Captain's arm.

"Be ye a thrifty Lanc'shire man? Nay, ye be but a Sussex ganter an ye fling thirty guineas to the fishes like this," he bawled at the Captain. "Let a naygur slaver beat 'un to death after ye pocket your guineas, man!"

For a moment Baldwin glared fiercely at Jem, then a chuckle came from his deep chest. "Aye, 'tis right! I'll let Monkey-Ear drive the laird's son into the cane fields. Flies will stick to his bloody back, then. Maggots, mayhap, and a dog's death. This were tame to that." Another blow and Baldwin cast the lash aside. "Cut him down and toss him below," he bellowed.

The boy hung slumped in the ropes that bound him. Long he lay unconscious while Jem worked over him. A tiny blue cross fastened to a string gleamed on the boy's white chest. Jem stared at it with fascinated eyes.

"Ye see yon?" he whispered to the farmer lad.

"Aye, mayhap it be a holy talisman," said the farmer lad. "I ha' seen the priest bless such."

"It be just that," said Jem, with certainty. "An' had the Laugher not had such a bauble 'ud a been a dead lad now and a feedin' the fishes like poor Jock."

The farmer lad, wise in the care of sick beasts, brought Ronald back to consciousness and, in the slow days that followed, healed the gashes left by the keel and the lash. But he knew that young Greaves would bear to his grave these marks of the Tiger's claws.

"Ye mun learn some restraint, lad." Big Jem took the boy under his tuition. "Ye see nothing can be gained by fighting wi' a little dagger agin a battle-axe. Now I fight wi' the axe mysel'. An a man comes wi' a ten foot spear, I run or dodge till I get inside his strike. No use to the King if I let him run me through. Now, ye ha' a fine head. That's for ye to use. Wait a bit and comes a day ye pay the Tiger out."

The boy was inclined to be bitter. When a sensitive, fine nature meets brutality, some damage must be done to it. Jem's sweet reasonableness, his kindly nature, which made him place his enormous strength and endurance at the service of all the weaker prisoners, and his gift of affection and

loyalty to the homesick boy, did more than anything else to give Ronald a sense of reason in all this hideousness. Jem was deeply religious, and his simple faith in the sureness of God's help restored the boy's endurance.

"Thank you, Jem Holms." It was a part of his code to acknowledge indebtedness. "If I had not you to help me, I fear I would give in to the thing. I'll stay away from the Tiger if I can, but—"

"What ye can't heal, ye need not look at, laddie. Harden your heart and wait till a chance comes to hit a blow. Ye can, maybe, outwit a brute and win o'er him wi' your brain. All I say is, don't just throw away your bolt."

The little Laird came to love the big gentle fisherman from Morecambe. As for Jem, he watched over the young lad like a tender father. His first morning thought was for his comfort, his last conscious word in the black pit at night was a prayer for his safety. He accepted every hardship he could that would spare Ronald.

CHAPTER IV

THE VOYAGE

FORTUNATELY, a blow came on that night and Ronald did not come under the Captain's notice for many days. Deadlights were put over the midship ports, and the hatches were fastened down. Conditions became unspeakably miserable in the narrow space occupied by the prisoners. As the storm increased in violence, the water poured through the cracks in the hatches and decks so that the prisoners were obliged, day and night, to sit erect against the timbers. Each time the ship dropped into the trough of mountainous waves, the timbers cracked and the vessel shook from end to end.

No fires were possible, so their food during the nine days the storm continued consisted of raw potatoes and mouldy biscuits. If Ronald, Laird of High Bindon, gave way during these nights of horror to a boy's anguish of loneliness, none knew of it unless it were big Jem Holms, against whose solid bulk the slim form was carefully shielded.

In the darkness of one night a mighty crash and splintering roar above their heads awakened them

from their uneasy sleep and stirred them to terror.

"God's mercy! Us 'uns foundered!" shrieked a wild voice.

"We be rats caught in a trap!" wailed another, who climbed the ladder and pounded on the hatch.

" 'Tis the mainmast gone! Us 'ull ride the easier for that," Jem's voice boomed out over the panic. " 'Tis no use tryin' to get out if we go to the bottom. Pray as ye wish, or curse if ye must, but best sit quiet or ye'll only break more bones."

The advice was wise. The farmer lad had been thrown violently against a stanchion and suffered a broken arm.

One night an agonized shrieking had announced the death of a fisher lad crushed by a broken timber. Before the hatches were lifted two others, old men, had died from lung colds. Through all the misery and horror Ronald had maintained a steady cheerfulness of tone, though he had come to understand why Jem had said that first night that it would be kinder to let Jock die at once. Jock, at that, had been the fortunate one.

When the storm subsided the prisoners began preparing their dead for sea burial when the hatches should be lifted. During this sad business came the most terrible moment of all. A violent heave of the ship pitched all in a heap on the port side of the hold, the farmer lad screaming with the

pain of his broken arm. A voice rose above the general cursing.

"Us 'a broached to! Now us 'uns be dead for certain. Down us go! God ha' mercy on our souls!"

A great crashing shook the vessel as she hung ready to slide to her doom. A broached ship seldom rights herself, for she can hardly be cleared quickly enough. But now the masts, split and weakened by the storm, broke off and washed away. This alone saved the *Friend's Adventure* from certain foundering. Slowly she righted herself, staggering in the trough of subsiding waves. Then the hatches were torn off.

"Come up out o' that, ye lipperings of gaol," came the mate's voice. "Come, help get up some rigging before I start a bilin' ye. Bust up on deck!"

Soon Ronald was staggering about on deck with Jem, helping to rig a jury mast and get a sail over a great leak in the keel. Then all must take turns at the pumps, for the old ship was leaking dangerously.

Finally they ran into the steady trades and warm sunshine, and then even the grilling work at the pumps became a pleasure. Jem assured Ronald that this work would save their strength and keep them fit for work when the voyage was over.

"If us ha' to work, then us best ha' strength to

do it wi', lad. Be sure ye drag that rotten salt pork in the sea for ten minutes. That 'ull take out the poison, like. And trade your mouldy biscuit for even a bit o' raw potato. Some 'ull be having their teeth falling out wi' the scurvy ere us gets to the Islands."

This was the case, all too soon. Calms delayed the *Friend's Adventure* and for days the leaking ship rolled miserably in the tropic sea. Jem had a small store of rotten, sprouting potatoes that he kept in a hole in the planking. Every day or two he "discovered" one which he made the boy eat. His own fine big body seemed to have power to resist all abuse.

One hot evening, Jem and Ronald sat beside the farmer lad as he lay dying on the deck. His broken arm had refused to knit and a poison from it had spread through his body.

"Never ye mind for me, little Laird," he consoled Ronald. "There be none to mind if I never come again. My mother and father died while I was at the war. Do you keep your bonny laugh and yon little blue cross on your neck. Belike they two 'ull bring ye safe back again to Scotland. Myself 'ull be glad to sleep down wi' the fishes. I ha' no bowels to stand the hardness of slavery in the island. They do say it be a dog's life."

Jem comforted the dying boy and closed his eyes

with gentle hands before the sailors, at the Tiger's command, tossed the broken body into the sea. He also turned some more of his philosophy of endurance into Ronald's heart.

"Let him go lightly, sir. He's loosed his hold on life gladly. Pray that you may do as much when it comes time for ye to go. Don't mind them sharks that follow. Nothin' matters now to that poor boy. He's up above, belike, smiling at our tears and glad it's finished."

The boy sat tight-lipped, staring into the purple night. "Some day there will be a world, Jem, where useless suffering will not be tolerated. I can't see any reason for all the wickedness of men. There must be reason in the world, mustn't there?"

"I ha' no learning, lad, like ye. The priest always do say sufferin' takes us up to heaven and weans us from a wicked world. I ha' always noticed that the kind, gentle folk like Jock and the farmer seem willin' to go. The wicked die a-fearin'. That's all. We just have to do the best us can till our time comes."

The boy gave a low laugh. Bitterness was in it and scorn for life that could hurt so wickedly.

"One must be the fox or the hound, I suppose. Well, the fox plays the game and makes as good a run as he may. If he loses in the end he has used all his tricks first. I am going to play every ruse,

every turn and back track, and carry my brush high. When I am finally brought to bay I'll go down fighting the dogs—and the winner is welcome to my brush. The chase is the thing, Jem. One must run it gallantly. That's the whole of life, I am thinking."

"Maybe, sir. I never went a-huntin', myself. Still I do like a game fish that fights till the last. I suppose maybe that's the big thing. For myself, I do be thinking I'd just stop, maybe; but I'd follow one like you, sir, till the last. There's summat that I can't quite see in it all."

The Captain sulked in his cabin during the days of calm, drinking too heavily. The slaves in the cargo had a foretaste of the labor in the fields as they strained at the pumps. Slowly, slowly, they drifted toward the Islands. Day by day the weaker ones dropped from labor to be tossed to the sharks almost before breath left their rotting bodies. Only sixty of the cargo of one hundred men, sent out for loyalty to their king, lived to enter the harbor at the Bridge, capital of Barbados, ninety days out from Morecambe Bay.

CHAPTER V

THE SLAVE AUCTION

ACROSS a long bridge, which gave entrance to the huddle of houses, came the planters of Barbados to bid for servants. Most of them were not sympathizers with the Protector, but that mattered little when it came to a chance to get cheap white labor.

The prisoners were lined up on the deck, and a sorry set they were in spite of the efforts Captain Baldwin had made at the last to get them in shape for inspection. Jem was undoubtedly the best physical specimen in the lot. The grilling work at the pumps had counteracted the ill food and filth below decks. Ronald, burned by the tropical sun and wind, his plaid kilts in rags, still kept the high-flung poise of his head and the level, unafraid gaze of his eyes. Jem had roughly shorn the boy's fair hair so that he had the look of a picked eagle. His lips were set in a hard, straight line and his eyes had the brooding, bitter look of a sensitive boy who has seen too much brutality. The boy had become a man—a man who hated. But he still could laugh, still raised his clear voice loudest in

the chanties, still met the grim future with a jest.

A portly man, fair Saxon in color, tanned so that his blue eyes were startling in his red face, came over the side of the ship. Dressed in crisp white linen, the very look of him made Ronald's heart leap. In spite of his tropical attire, he was like a Scottish hunting squire. Colonel Clarke never left the choosing of his white servants to an agent or overseer.

"Good day, Captain," said the Colonel. "I need ten strong field-workers and a clerk for my office, a man with some learning."

With his throat throbbing, Ronald stepped a pace forward.

"My father was a scholar, sir. I could—"

The Captain shot a glance at the mate, whose heavy hand came over the boy's mouth, choking his eager words and yanking him back into his place. The Captain spoke softly and with great respect to the Colonel, whose pleasant eyes had turned to the boy with interest.

"That's a devil's own brat, sir," the Captain said, and Ronald's despair, which made him struggle violently with the mate, gave the air of verity to the Captain's quiet speech. "He started a mutiny the first morning out of harbor. He's the Jack Cade to stir up an insurrection among your slaves within twenty-four hours."

The Colonel's kind eyes hardened and he turned decisively away from the frantically struggling boy. No one thing in the world spells terror to the planter as does the word slave-rising. Alone as they dwell, four or five whites on a great plantation with two or three hundred negroes, they have hourly over their heads the fear of organized revolt. The Captain's quiet remark had killed Ronald's chance for an easy task under the kindest master on the island.

Jem, when he realized what Tiger Baldwin had accomplished, put on such a truculent, furious air, which his very real anger made easy, that in spite of his evident physical fitness Colonel Clarke passed by him, also, choosing a Carlisle cloth merchant for his clerk and farmers and pitmen for his field help. While he was inspecting the line, a thin, black-faced man came over the side.

"Just the men for you, Mr. Penne," the Tiger called, when he had cheerily waved the satisfied Colonel down the ladder. "Here's a brat that your Monkey-Ear Lazaire will take joy in training. He's strong as steel and has the grip of a bull pup on a poplar root. He has a bad mouth and a devil's temper, however."

This was the one moment of his life when Ronald's courage almost failed him. The look of Colonel Clarke, and the clean, orderly life his very

presence indicated, had caused homesickness to fill the boy's heart. Now as he looked into the cold, opaque eyes of Barebone Penne, a loathing crept into his soul. There was something so menacing, so gloating in their evil, that the boy was chilled as if something inhuman were near.

"Cheer up, matie," came Jem's mumble. "Yon's nought but a little devil's poodle. Ye be still the Laugher, mate." So Ronald shook himself and laughed once more on Tiger Baldwin's deck in the Tiger's face. The sound narrowed Baldwin's eyes again and sent an odd flicker into Penne's dull orbs.

"Aye, ye may have the stout 'un, too, Mr. Penne, though I had a mind to get more for himself than ye be willin' to offer. It 'ull be much satisfaction to me, knowing that he will see Monkey-Ear stripe the Laugher's bare back each day in the cane fields when he lets out that lordly bray."

"I am a righteous man, Captain Baldwin. No man can say I overstep my rights. I get from my servants but a fair return for their food and houses and clothing. Only, if any show not respect for their lawful lord and master, as the Bible commands, they must be disciplined for their souls' good." Penne's words were entirely without modulation, like the dropping of stones on hard ground. When he moved into the Captain's cabin to finish

negotiations for the purchase of the best of the prisoners, Ronald and Jem looked at each other. The one consoling fact to Ronald was that Jem was to share his hardships.

So close had big, awkward Jem come to the youth that he represented all that meant home or love or gentleness in a world of brutality. Ronald felt that his heart was knit to Jem's. He knew, too, that Jem had deliberately given up an easier captivity for this one of unknown evil.

In all the troubles they faced together in the days that lay ahead of them, Ronald would remember that whatever the loyalty of the big man meant it certainly entailed on him a like devotion and service. That, Ronald found as the deadly days of hard labor came to them, was the one thing that made life endurable—the feeling that there was one to whom he was leader, one who must follow him, for Ronald was of the stuff of which leaders are made. So long as there was a cause, however forlorn, he must lift a banner and cry, "We'll win."

For an hour the auction continued, and Tiger Baldwin made so good a bargain that he rubbed his hands gleefully. When Penne's slaves dropped over the side of the *Friend's Adventure,* he grinned into the thin, hard face and fierce eyes of the Laird of High Bindon.

"If you live, Laugher, I get you again some day."

"I'll live, Baldwin. There'll come a day of reckoning for you." It was the Tiger who laughed this time, an exultant roaring laugh that was echoed by all of his crew. It seemed funny for a redleg (name given to white slaves) to be threatening the captain of the *Friend's Adventure.*

When the line of newly bought servants crossed the long bridge to the town, Barebone Penne's overseer, Monkey-Ear Lazaire, was waiting to conduct them to Penne's plantation some miles up the coast.

Lazaire was the most enormous Senegal negro Ronald ever saw. Near seven feet in height, with enormous shoulders that dwarfed Jem's thick muscles, he had the smooth litheness of a black panther. His head was curiously small, with long pointed ears that had given him his name. His eyes were small, rather than the rolling orbs common to negroes, and they had the still, unblinking look of the saurian monsters that infest the rivers of his native land.

In spite of his hardships and the menace of the future, Ronald found himself interested in the noisy chatter of the tropical town. It was a relief, after the long weeks of wretchedness in the *Friend's Adventure,* to see pleasant English faces

and hear cheerful voices raised in a morning salute. Little black babies tumbled about cabin doors, as the line of slaves, led by Lazaire who had so far not uttered a word, plodded past the outskirts of the town. Penne, on a small donkey, brought up the rear of the line.

It was still early morning, the planters having come aboard ship at sunrise. As the party drew away from the town they met a curious procession coming in. White-clad negro women, some young and comely in their round slimness, some ample in proportions as Ceres herself, and all, like priestesses to some harvest goddess, bearing baskets upon their heads with the choicest offerings of field and orchard. Bananas and pineapples were heaped in one; oranges, limes and plantains in another. From one basket on the head of a chuckling, mammoth black woman, the heads of two little kids peered out of a mass of tangled blossoms piled to shelter them from the sun. Around this figure, two little pickaninnies, clad only in their blackness, romped and shrieked in glee.

Ronald laughed, the gay boyish laugh of his happy days at High Bindon, for he was reminded of a jar that stood in the great hall, brought from southern Europe by his father. Around its lovely curved sides wound a procession of figures bearing gifts to a shrine of Bacchus. It was amusing to see

this strange black parody of a bacchanal procession.

At the sound of the boy's laugh, Lazaire, who had dropped back for a moment to commune in some silent way with his small master, strode to the front. The effect upon the figures in the market processional was instantaneous. Gone was the rolling laughter, the happy chuckling, the shrieking of the pickaninnies. Dark, somber eyes rolled at Lazaire, and the women gave him the width of the road. The black babies huddled behind white skirts as the line hurried past.

The great black looked down into Ronald's upturned curious face.

"You, redlegs! Pick 'em, fast!" It was a rumble from the deep chest.

"Trot, matie, don't answer!" Jem trod on Ronald's heels and the boy set out at a smart trot, a pace that had carried him miles over the hills on many a summer day.

The line followed and Barebones' donkey was hard put to keep up with the line. Monkey-Ear Lazaire kept the line at this pace. Once a Lancasterman, one who showed the worst effects of the filthy food on board the *Friend's Adventure,* fell and lay swearing feebly that he could do no more. Penne came forward, driving the rest ahead and Lazaire fell behind. A turn in the narrow road

hid him. What methods of torture Lazaire used on the slave Ronald did not know then. But presently the miserable man, stumbling and groaning, overtook the line and somehow managed to keep the pace.

BOOK TWO

Beholden

CHAPTER I

THE MacALLSTAR

NO physical joy he had ever known had given Ronald such body-deep satisfaction as the taste of the orange tossed to him by a comely mulatto woman. He felt the acid freshness of the juice like an elixir in his scurvy-tainted body. Soon all the white slaves were munching at fresh fruit as they ran—for the negroes were kind—and when the huge Lazaire reappeared they had renewed vigor for the stiff pace he set them. After some hours, Ronald became aware that the hot road beneath his feet was sloping upward through an avenue of stately palms toward a white mansion with wide verandas and long windows that stood open to the sea breezes. Green lawns and a riot of colored flowers made it look like a bit of paradise.

"Turn ye!" The grunted command was accompanied by a prod from Lazaire's cart whip. It indicated a lane between the canebrakes which covered the slopes. At Lazaire's command the white slaves turned into a dusty road through the fields of cane. Minutes of traveling in the stifling

heat of the close rows of sugar cane brought them to a beaten clearing, where a marshy stream trickled toward the seashore. Here was a huddle of stone cabins where little black pickaninnies scuttled like small beetles. Penne had ridden on toward the mansion; Lazaire, too, was evidently in a hurry to be elsewhere. He lifted his bull voice in a bellowed shout. A witch-like black woman issued from one of the huts. Her white wool was almost hidden beneath a rag of red calico and her bent body was covered by a dress of the same fabric. She halted at some distance before Lazaire and made an obeisance, her dim eyes searching for sight of his face. An interchange of words followed. Then Lazaire waved his hand at the white slaves and disappeared down another road.

"You buckra mans come along with Subie. Plenty man huts; plenty loblolly."

She hobbled past the nearer huts, where little black heads were beginning to peer from the openings, and led the miserable men to several cabins far from the water. They were built of withes and were entirely empty save for shelves along the walls. A tight basket in front of one held a quantity of dirty looking stuff of mush-like consistency.

"Loblolly!" muttered the old crone. She thrust her skinny hand into the basket and conveyed a bit to her toothless mouth.

"Eat! Sleep! Work at sunrise, buckra mans!" With a chuckle she hobbled back to the staring black babies, who were her charges while the field hands labored.

This bare shelved hut and this glue-like mush were to be Ronald Greaves' lodging and food for many months.

After some hours of heavy sleep Ronald awoke on the hard bench that was his bed, shaking violently with chill. Jem's deep snoring came from the side of the hut. The sea wind, blowing over the wastes of salt water, had swept away the tropical sun heat; without sufficient clothing, with no bedding, the penetrating chill was a deadly menace. The boy had half raised himself, meaning to huddle against big Jem's body for mutual warmth, when a shadow fell across the moonlight that flooded the open face of the hut. It was the shadow of a human being, and a soft, hissing voice called:

"Little buckra man! Scots buckra man!"

Two strides carried young Greaves to the door where a slim girl lifted an ash-colored face in the moonlight. She looked to Ronald like a bronze statue coming to life. She was dressed (as all the negro women who had trooped in from the cane fields last night had been) in a short skirt extending to her knees and a stole-like vest with two

ends that hung down from her brown shoulders. Her lifted arms pointed toward the mansion house.

"Come, little buckra man. Waunica take to old, old massa! No talk!" Her hand was laid over her mouth expressively, and her voice was less loud than the wind in the canes. "Come away fas', little massa slave." She fled like a shadow among the silent huts where bone-weary laborers slept.

Ronald followed, after suppressing an impulse to awaken Jem. Leaving the beaten earth of the quarters, the two passed through a lane among the cane fields. A hedge of logwood bordering the estate sent a heavenly fragrance into the whiteness of the tropical night. Ronald felt all misgiving leave him and an exhilarated feeling of expectation take its place. There was some suggestion of adventure in following a bronze goddess through aphrodisian moonlight. His chilled blood began to sing again in his veins, as it had long ago when he followed the hunt on Grey Bess. He threw up his head and a breath of the old song came to his lips.

His guide skirted a mass of buildings whose furnace glare indicated them to be the sugar mills, fled along the back of a row of huts somewhat better than the field slave quarters, each with its tiny garden of flowers, finally rounded the last cabin in the row and paused at the open door.

"This little buckra mans, massa Star," was the guide's announcement, and then she melted into the darkness of the cabin.

"Will you please to enter without fear, Ronald Greaves?"

This astonishing invitation, uttered in the cultivated voice of a Scottish gentleman, left Ronald motionless for a moment until his own courtly training rushed back. He stepped unhesitatingly into the black interior.

"I am most happy to come to you, sir." His voice was as calmly courteous as that of his unseen host had been.

A dry chuckle was his answer. A soft sound of a closing shutter was followed by a light. Crouched in a low chair beside a table that held a candle, was a very small, a very old, a very thin little man whose blue eyes beneath carefully brushed silver hair searched the boy's bronzed face as the candle gleam illumed it. The old man was dressed in the garb of a Highland laird and his green and red plaid was drawn closely about his narrow shoulders. He had an air of strange authority and his voice was the voice of a young man.

"I am MacAllstar, once Dr. MacAllyne MacAllstar of Dumfries Town."

"Oh!" Ronald could not refrain. "My father's friend."

"Aye, lad! I am that man who at seventy was so brash as to volunteer the information to the Crop Ears that if I had been young enough I had followed his Majesty, God bless him! The ranter's tribunal barbadosed me and for ten years, here on William Halnaker's plantation, I have meditated on the mistakes of impulse.

"When I heard Barebone Penne to-day order a Greaves of High Bindon to the cane fields, my heart told me that my years in this hell-pit were not wasted. There are things ye must know, laddie, to save ye alive for your mother, her who was once pretty Joan Monnaive of Mochnaben."

The old eyes had been watching the boy's face closely, first in question, then in complete satisfaction as the boy suddenly lost his restraint and knelt before the tiny oldster, his face against the thin old knee.

"There is much we may be able to say each to the other, please God, but—my time grows short and what I had longed to ask of the homeland I seem to see in my own soul. I thank God one has come to me that I can help a wee bit before I dree my weird."

"No, no!" the anguished young face was a storm of protest.

"Acceptance is a thing to learn, my young Laird. Look at what is about ye and do the best ye can

with it. An eminently respectable Scottish gentleman, a scholar and a surgeon, has been led to the mouth of the pit itself and there seen and performed unspeakable things. But still old MacAllyne MacAllstar can look his Maker in the face and say, 'I did the best I could with the bit things about me, Lord!' A man is only called on to be a man.

"Accept this, laddie: Within ten days the MacAllstar meets his God. I think I ha' endured only that I might serve a Greaves; grandson of auld Hugh Monnaive. There is much I must say hurriedly, much ye must know, for my mantle is to fall upon your shoulders. Ken ye the second sight, laddie, and the Gaelic, and the science of the stars?"

"Oh, yes! I know the war songs in the Gael, and many a marvel of second sight did my mother tell of old Margot Monnaive, her great aunt."

"Then listen well, laddie, how God works in strange and mysterious ways his wonders to perform, and how the Gaelic burr and the tricks of second sight and astrology may save human souls and bodies in this hell-pit under the tropics."

A word from the old man sent the quadroon girl away into the night and the candle was extinguished. Then Ronald Greaves, in the darkness of the hut, listened to old Dr. MacAllstar's strange

story of his ten years on the Halnaker plantation, Beholden—now Penne's Beholden.

"Things were not so ill at Beholden when William Halnaker brought me here to serve as clerk and physician. Barebone was manager even then and Lazaire was his tool, but Halnaker, though a follower of king-killing black Cromwell, was something of a gentleman and the restraint of his presence held some hope for the slaves.

"On the night of the great hurricane I had clerked but a few months for Halnaker, but I had earned the hate of the manager. It was that night that old William received his death blow.

"I know not why the babes born in the tropics are so difficult to keep alive. Most of them, especially the negroes, die of lockjaw before the tenth day. Old William's delicate English wife had borne him five children—three of them boys—but his only living child was a frail girl not yet fifteen. Another son was born on the night when the great hurricane burst upon us. It is difficult to make ye understand the fury of the wind when the very earth itself trembles in its power. Every window in the great house was shattered; not one spot was safe from the wind's fury. The fearful sounds and fury of that storm were too much for the mother and her newborn babe.

"When the dawn came, and the wind ceased,

mother and son lay quiet in death and William Halnaker was a broken man. He died within a month and little Miss Ellen has had the look of the ghost-ridden ever since.

"Ah, laddie, I forget to be brief when I go back to old times. But bear with me. I came to feel friendship for William Halnaker. When Barebone Penne took Miss Ellen to Bridgetown and wedded her, the day after her father's death, then Beholden became the mouth of the pit for us all. He's an adder coiled in a dove's nest, is Penne. He has all the silence, the venom, the hateful effluvia of a king cobra—and Lazaire is his fang!

"Monkey-Ear is a Senegal black and he possesses weird magic power over all who come within range of his eye, just as a snake charms the fluttering birds. Obeah is a dark magic from Africa and, of course, Lazaire is an obeah man.

"There is no charm against magic. I conceive it to be a mind power, not magic at all. A greater mind power can conquer it. Monkey-Ear and I came to conflict almost my first day here, as he will with ye, lad.

"I must confess the glare of his eyes made a shiver in my backbone even though my gorge arose; I felt myself slipping into something dark and terrible. Then I flung back my head and fixed his eyes with my own and swung into an old Gaelic

curse that my grandfather had shouted at the harrying of his cattle by the raiders from Teviotdale. It was a most complete cursing, from the womb to the rotting bones in the grave. My grandfather taught it to me when I begged him, though he told me it could be used only thrice in a lifetime under immense provocation, lest it curse one's own self down into the pit. I had not remembered it for fifty years and had used it but once, but it flowed over my tongue like spate over a dam. And ere I had finished I was granted the second sight—aye, it came to me then—the real power, and I pointed to Lazaire and said:

" 'You shall die by the small worm from the nail of a wee girl child.' I did not know what I meant, even then, for I had never heard of the cassava worm, but Monkey-Ear turned the color of logwood ash and my uplifted finger has held him in slavish fear ever since.

"To be brief, I became the greater obeah man. There is nothing Lazaire will not do if I agree to extend his period of freedom from that death curse. I made more certain of my power by announcing the hour of the death of William Halnaker, whose acute angina pectoris was brought to a head by that night of stress and exertion.

"Penne hates me, but his hate cannot conquer Lazaire's fear. Even Penne, in spite of his profes-

sion of religion, fears the glare of my eyes, for I make them very dreadful when I use the Gaelic. So I have lived apart, hated and feared even by the blacks whose good I seek. I have been at the obeah meetings in the chalk hills where a hell brew was made and drunk by all the blacks who fear Lazaire, and I learned the words of their own magic to curse them withal.

"I have made horoscopes of every soul in the plantation whose birthday I could approximate. I foretell to them the evils and what they may expect. I told the bookkeeper, Snass Boons, when he kicked his woman, that he would lose that foot within a week. He was caught in a belt in the mill and crushed until the leg had to be amputated. I told black Eboa Jack that his woman was not true to him. Within ten days she ran away into the hills to the harem of a free black who is a strong obeah man. Of course, they believe that I cause the evil instead of merely foretelling it, so I am most carefully cared for by all the blacks. The joys I foretell are equally certain.

"There, lad, is my mantle. Ye are the sort who can carry on this magic. The first prophecy ye make must be my death, foretold to the moment. Nay, never start so, dear lad. I hope for the hour of my release from this mortal agony I carry in my breast. It is a cancer and it is at its ending

bite. My flask, lad, canst reach it? There—"

The tale was interrupted by the pain of the old physician's tone. Ronald passed him a small bottle from the table. Then he sat for many moments grasping Ronald's hands in a desperate grip, silently suffering. Presently he began again to talk with the voice of a spent runner.

"Nay, do not protest. We do not know the hour of your testing by Monkey-Ear. Ye must be prepared, lad, to stage the drama well. Ye have the presence and the voice and I shall give ye the material. My death shall come at the last hour of this old moon, the hour of midnight on Friday, the thirteenth of this very month, which is but nine days hence. My stars foretell it, laddie. No words of yours or mine may change their courses and of my own will I would not delay the hour. I only hold my strength to endure until that hour. What I can to help ye before then, I will do. Poor Ellen, little martyred maid, also passes this month with me into the darkness. She is utterly thankful to loosen her hold upon life. She dies, I verily believe, from soul-sickness of Barebone Penne. Three babes she has borne him, and only joy was in her face when each died in her arms. Her passing, according to her stars, will be but four days after the new moon. Ye must get to the mansion house to look upon her ere ye make that foretelling, and

make it ye must—to Barebone Penne, his own self! She knows, poor child! I told her, to ease her life-weary soul, to endure to her God-made time, for she begged me often to end her with a sleeping drug."

The old voice became very faint and died away.

"Oh, sir, I do beseech you, concern yourself not with me, but rest yourself," begged Ronald.

"Hand me yon flask once more, lad."

Presently the voice in the darkness began growing gradually stronger.

"I cannot know if I shall be able to talk with ye again, my dear son. I must talk all I can this once. I have written down all my doings and cast forward all the horoscopes to the end of the year; all these things be in a box under the stone in yon far corner of this hut. They are safest there and will guide ye when ye wear my mantle of prophecy. My last warning to Lazaire shall be that he must let you live in this hut and take my place as healer and obeah man, lest his small worm destroy him at once. Don't fail to remind him of that fate when ye start your drama, lad. He cannot know that I have seen you. The maid who brought you is mine completely, held by love and fear, for her mother was beaten to death by Lazaire's own hands. Go now, my lad. I may not speak with you again, but my blessing is upon you."

CHAPTER II

THE NEW PROPHET

AT sunup the plantation of Penne's Beholden burst into noisy life. The first thing Ronald heard was the clatter of barnyard talk. A red cock crowed before the hut; a speckled hen with a ragged brood fussed noisily at a creeping cat and chased it from the scene; a fat shoat chased by a naked black boy of seven or eight plunged headlong into Ronald's hut as he rose and stepped out to view the community. Black men and women, clad in scanty garments, were laughing and rolling black eyes as they ate handfuls of sickening loblolly, the slave's staff of life.

Then, as a great bell pealed a summons across the fields of rustling canes, a mulatto man with a cart whip under his arm came down the lane from the sugar mill. His whip cracked a warning.

"Get into dem canes, ye negers!"

Instantly the camp was deserted. Men and women disappeared into the cane with many a loud guffaw and backward flung jest as if the day's work were a *fiesta*. The talk was in Congo Saw, an almost un-understandable dialect to the northern

men. The field boss turned to the new whites, who had barely had time to satisfy their belly craving with a handful of the nauseous mess called lob-lolly. A satisfied smirk wreathed the features of the mulatto.

"Into dem canes, buckra slaves. Lazaire obeah dis Plato but we sweat ye in the field dis day. Hurry him up, hurry him up!"

Without knowing what to do or where to go, the miserable apprentices were herded by cracks from the cart whip into the sea of canes. Presently, imitating the work of the laughing and singing negroes about them, Ronald and Jem were cutting canes and staggering under great bundles which they carried from the fields to the inferno of the blazing furnaces at the mill.

In the early morning the toil seemed not unendurable, but when the blazing tropical sun beat at midday upon their uncovered heads the northerners came to know what MacAllstar had meant by saying Beholden was the mouth of the pit. Neither the toil nor the heat seemed to have any effect upon the blacks, who kept up a constant rattle of laughter and talk.

In the white blaze of the mid-afternoon, when not a breath was stirring the drooping cane leaves, a sudden cessation of the Congo Saw brought Ronald out of a daze wherein his arms had been mov-

ing automatically at the task his brain had set them. Monkey-Ear Lazaire was standing over Bam Slaven, the Lancaster fisherman, whose scurvy had again come over him. He lay unconscious under the steamy heat of the field. Black faces, with rolling eyes, peered from the canes, while complete silence reigned. The mulatto boss came up when Lazaire lifted a hand, and silently presented the great cart whip. Slowly Lazaire's arm rose and fell. Sickeningly the thud of the blows on the inert body struck Ronald's ears. Jem's great hand closed over the boy's shoulder.

"Work, lad!" the husky voice murmured in his ear. "Go on, cut your canes."

No sound came from the fallen Slaven. His sick spirit had retreated too far for the pain of his body to reach.

"Try irons!" Lazaire's words were a low rumble as he turned away from the fallen slave. "You, Pete! Clumbo! Carry he away! Gully for he if irons no good. Jump!"

Two black men sprang upon Bam Slaven and, dragging his limp body, disappeared down the cane row. The negroes fell to work.

Jem was piling his cut canes, anxiously murmuring to Ronald, who stood dazed. "Work! For God's sake, work, lad!"

Monkey-Ear was advancing upon him, the cart

whip swinging like the tail of a tiger. The black's deadly cold eyes were balefully fixing those of the white slave who was to be broken by field labor. Lazaire's eyes were no longer cold and opaque, but were wells of some dreadful iniquity, the very hint of which sent a shiver along Ronald's spine even in the torridity of the cane field. He felt himself sinking helplessly into fetid blackness.

The cart whip swung with slow inevitability and fell, not on the helpless boy but across the broad shoulders of Jem, who had dropped his canes and sprung forward at the last minute in a futile effort to protect the little Laird who stood so impotent and small before the enormous bulk of the black. The tip of the whip flicked against Ronald's neck, biting out a bit of flesh as a flying bullet might have done.

The spell was broken. The mist left the boy's eyes. The purple congestion of his face, the agony of his cramped muscles, the burning blister the white sun had made of his fair northern skin, all his physical distress seemed to penetrate to his brain. The flat of his outflung hand shoved Jem aside. His blazing grey-green eyes transfixed the negro while from his sun-cracked lips rang wild laughter, followed by the weird guttural sounds of a Gaelic chant. All recognized the language of the old physician's magic. The shrill young voice rose

in the white sunlight, poising like a visible spirit over the clearing in the cane field where the spellbound negroes, now kneeling in awe, rolled enormous eyes at this mystery. Lazaire, with head thrust forward like an ugly vulture, remained as if struck into black marble. Slowly Ronald's wild cries dwindled to a minor wail. He lifted his left arm, stiffly pointing with one finger at Lazaire's breast. The Gaelic turned into a slow toning of understandable English.

"The great black elephant will die by the worm that is hatching for him, the worm that utterly destroys."

Lazaire recoiled before the pointing finger and the wide, blazing eyes.

"I see," the slow voice continued steadily, "the bit of a sambo girl-thing whose heel will stand on the elephant's head. More I see—." The voice wavered, broke, then continued in a deeper, more mournful note that shook the circle of listeners. "I see an old magician. Ah! the tooth of the serpent gnaws at his vitals! Ah! I see the wise old man lying dead at the last hour of the old moon. Ah, MacAllstar!" The wide, fixed eyes were staring up into the white bowl of the sky. The boy flung wide his arms. "Yes, master, I accept your power and your magic!"

A gasp rose from the kneeling negroes. It would

be impossible to describe the effect of this scene upon their child-like, superstition-ridden souls. Even the midday sun, the commonplaceness of the opening in the cane, the smallness and fragility of the lad himself, in no way detracted from the power that emanated from his uplifted spirit. Indeed, Ronald was no longer acting a part. Carried away in the moment of physical fatigue, self-hypnotized by the old Gaelic chant, the boy's spirit had become utterly fey. He saw the body of Lazaire squirming in the agony of a horrible death, he saw the body of the old physician lying in peace after months of concealed agony. The negroes saw his projected vision and, shuddering, hid their faces.

"At midnight when this moon dies, the wise man shall lie cold in death, and his spirit and his wisdom shall enter into me, his chosen son. I shall then be his voice. Even now he speaks through me. Go." Again the finger pointed at Lazaire. "Go ask MacAllstar if what I have just told you of him be the truth or a falsehood. Go! Go now!"

The tone of ringing command was not to be withstood. With a face the color of ash, Lazaire silently handed the whip to the mulatto headman, then, keeping his face toward the strange white, backed slowly out into the cane road.

Even the whites looked at Ronald with fear and wonder.

"God bless me, laughin' Laird, but an ye p'int that finger at me I'd like as not drop as dead as pore ol' Bam Slaven. He do be done in for certain now." Jem voiced the feelings of Ronald's mates.

Soon the billhooks were clashing among the canes, but the Congo Saw was silent. Presently a brawny black began a refrain that all joined. Gradually the words droned into Ronald's senses and seemed to connect fearfully with Lazaire's last order.

"Tak' 'im to de gully, tak' 'im to de gully,
But bring back de frock and de board.
'Oh, massa, massa! Me no deadie yet!'
Tak' 'im to de gully, tak' 'im to de gully!
Carry 'im along!"

A deep gully lay behind the sugar sheds of Beholden. There black vultures hovered all day, tracing sinister circles against the blue sky. In time, Ronald came to know that this oriental burial was all the slaves had to expect after lives of drudgery.

That night Ronald told Jem about his talk with the old physician.

"Well, little Laird, it mun be as God Hisself has raised up this friend for ye. I ha' been sick at my soul, I do tell ye, as to what that big black might do wi' ye. Here is a thing that fightin' cannot help. I ha' been lookin' here an' yon for some

club that I might kill him with at the last minute if he did a devil's act to ye."

"You are right, Jem. It must be a special Providence that I found MacAllstar, for I knew I could not live long under the power of that beast. Now—well, now there is a chance. It is a slim one, it is true, for of course Penne may be above superstition, and he has the power, under the law, to beat or torture or, if he chooses, to kill any slave."

"They tell me the negers are cared better for than the whites by all these planters. Now how can one who says he be a Christian do that?"

"That's easy enough to explain, Jem. Self-interest is the strongest thing in any man. The blacks are slaves for life and so must be kept alive for twenty or even thirty years of servitude. White slaves must be set free in ten years at best. Most whites cannot live in this sun at field labor more than three or four, so they use them up quickly.

"Well, this power MacAllstar has given me is a weapon that I am determined to use to the utmost. It may save us, or it may fail. The only way to rise superior to Fortune is to ride on its topmost edge. I shall push my luck to its limit, Jem."

"Aye, but don't o'ertopple it." Jem was cautious. "Ye mun learn, as I said, to look away when there is no need to see. Only a fool would keep buttin' agin' a stone wall."

"Yes, when one sees it is a stone wall, one should take a cannon, Jem, or maybe climb over it. Anyway, I have a very different feeling about us. MacAllstar said, 'Use the bit things about us and make the best life we can.' That's good sense, Jem. I feel a man again."

"I ha' seen that thing the many a time, little Laird. The blooded dog will always fight wi' his last gasp of air; 'tis the cur tucks his tail to his belly an' runs yelpin'. Bam Slaven is dead an' ye are stronger'n ye be when ye sailed. Ye'll win through, little Laird."

CHAPTER III

DEATH OF A PROPHET

THE days passed in the grilling work. Nauseous as the loblolly mess appeared, it cured the taint of scurvy in the blood, and the whites gained in power to endure the labor. Nights spent shivering in the cold wind seemed now to be the greatest evil, but this was harder upon the blacks than upon the northerners. Morning after morning they came from their cabins shaking as with an ague, but with the rising of the sun their mercurial spirits returned and the procession to the cane fields seemed like a fete. The mulatto held his hand, though in pompous tones he exhorted the whites to labor. He carefully avoided Ronald and Jem, who were always together. For four days no word came from MacAllstar, and Lazaire did not come within sight of the boy. Penne, too, was invisible. Then, late one night, the quadroon girl brought Ronald a note.

"Seek not to see me again. I have told Lazaire that nothing can prevent your prophecy coming true to the moment. For the first time I have permitted him to observe my physical agony, which

he believes you have caused. I have warned him that his death follows closely on your end here at the plantation. I believe that time to be some years removed, perhaps three.

"At midnight of the old moon, come openly to my hut and call upon my spirit. I shall wait for that moment. All the slaves will be there watching for the working of your magic. Be bold and fearless, my son."

One result Ronald had found from his exhibition of magic was that offerings of food were placed in his hut, a few boiled yams, an orange, plantains boiled green, a jar of liquor from fermented potatoes. These made a welcome addition to the everlasting mush made from maize. The slaves went once a week to the groves of plantains and returned with a week's supply, one large bunch for each worker. On the Sabbath the white slaves cleaned the furnaces in which the fires burned day and night throughout the week.

On the last day of the old moon Ronald told Jem of the midnight tryst with MacAllstar.

"I will not venture to offer advice to ye, lad, but go wi' ye, I will. If the old man should not die on the moment, an' I see not how he can, there may be great danger to ye."

"That is, of course, a possibility," Ronald agreed. "But let me tell you, Jem, old MacAllyne

MacAllstar is not a man to remain alive if he wills to die, nor die, I think, if he wills to live. Yet I feel a new power in me, a power over that black which I do believe naught now can shake—thanks to the wisdom given me by my friend! I confess to you, Jem, that without that help I could hardly have withstood the evil I felt in him that day in the field. He has a power that shrivels the soul."

"Aye! I, too, saw that he is possessed of an evil spirit. Belike God has not yet seen fit to crush it, as He will in His good time." Jem's simple religious faith was a comfort.

At the turn of the night Ronald stepped to the door of the hut with Jem beside him. It was a night of falling meteors, and ever and anon the deep blue bowl of the sky was streaked with flame. "Good staging for the drama," thought Ronald with a whimsical smile.

As the two approached the physician's cabin they became aware of a faint murmur of sound. Before the huts were kneeling all the slaves from the plantation. In the dim light of the stars, dark eyes rolled toward them. Then, as a meteor shot across the sky, another swelling murmur rose and the black faces were flattened to the ground.

The door of MacAllstar's cabin was closed and before it loomed the giant figure of Lazaire. In a silence that fell over the assembled blacks a shrill

cockcrow split the air like a flash of light in darkness. Ronald strode into the open space before the guarded door. Almost merging with the call of the cock the boy's high, clear voice rang out. The harsh syllables of the old Gaelic he used fell into the listening silence as stones from a height fall into an empty pit. Then came distinct English words, spoken slowly.

"The last midnight of the old moon has passed. The dawn moon trembles below the horizon. I call now upon your spirit, MacAllyne MacAllstar, to come forth and look beyond the stars into the face of your Maker."

Two voices within the hut were heard, one a deprecating, protesting voice. Then the old Scot's voice rose above it, clear and ringing, with the clarion tones of a spirit freed from mortal bonds.

"Open the shutters! At long last MacAllstar goes home!"

As the blinds were pushed aside by the little maid, the interior of the dimly lighted hut was revealed. Barebone Penne had been standing beside MacAllstar's bed, evidently attempting to restrain him. But the old doctor now thrust his master aside as if he were a troublesome child. The magician was dressed in his plaids, with cap on head and tartan drawn about his narrow shoulders. He now strode into the outer darkness

and the light was quenched in the hut.

Now MacAllstar spoke to Ronald, who stepped forward and joined his shrill young voice with the old man's in a Gaelic coronach. The night resounded with the weird lamenting that Highlanders make above their warrior dead. The frightened blacks shook as they flattened themselves to the ground. Then, in a clear voice, but with a hint of breaking strain, the physician addressed the slaves in slow English.

"Know ye, my children, that I see into the future and with my last breath I speak true words. You, my son Ronald, must take my place here and care for these, my people, who will obey you, for I give you my power. I see you fighting by sea and land, ah, many the long year! When your treasure of the sign of the cross comes to you, betrayal shall seem to end all. God Himself shall interpose for your succor from the pit and the deep shall cast you up to life and joy. Joan Monnaive, I see your son in your arms."

The queer deadness of the doctor's voice made Ronald's flesh creep. This he knew was no stage effect; this was the second sight. Then, in the death-like silence that hung over the scene, a rushing meteor swept across the midheaven, a meteor so enormous that a pale unearthly gleam lighted the scene, so that MacAllyne MacAllstar's white

face and head were clearly visible to all.

"The sign! The sign!" His voice rang out for the last time. Then softly, "My dear son, lift me in your arms toward the sky. MacAllstar meets his God."

The blazing meteor endured long enough so that all saw the tall boy holding aloft the rigid body of the magician. Darkness rushed back and the boy felt the thin form go limp in his arms. As he turned into the hut to lay the small figure on the bed, a faint sigh brushed his cheek. "Home!" was the lonely exile's last whisper.

A fragrance of bitter almond oil hung in the air as Ronald bent above the still form. MacAllstar had taken no chances on a hitch at his dramatic moment, but Ronald knew that the outworn heart had ceased to beat at the moment MacAllstar willed, that his spirit had passed with the falling star.

The mantle of a prophet lay on the slender shoulders of a novice.

CHAPTER IV

PENNE'S WIFE

RONALD had his first view of the mansion of Beholden the next morning when he was summoned by Barebone Penne. The boy did not know he should report at the small room in the wing of the building which was used by Penne as an office. Instead, he strode in his tattered plaids to the great door in the wind swept veranda. As he mounted the steps a woman dressed in white paused on the sweeping round of the grand staircase to stare at him. In the livid red of his face his eyes gleamed green as tourmalines. His legs, bare from mid-thigh, were burned to the same brilliant tint as his face. The tilt of his head held an arrogance no slave should exhibit. His eyes opened wide as they caught the black ones of the young woman on the stairway and he swept her a bow that reflected the manners of a court rather than the cane fields.

She was the saddest thing Ronald Greaves had ever beheld. Thin to the point of attenuation, she held herself erect only by a sort of pitiful pride. The eyes in the thin triangle of her face were dark

pools that held all the shadows of life. They alone seemed to possess any vitality; they quivered as if with the starshine of old memories. They dwelt hungrily on the vividness of the little Laird, as a dungeon dweller might gaze at the sun. Her voice came to Ronald, and it held the dead quality of utter hopelessness.

"Good morning! You must be the young gentleman who foretold Dr. MacAllstar's death."

She drifted down the stairs until she stood in the doorway, but the boy still had a curious illusion of vast distance between them, across which they could barely commune. He felt the necessity of being completely honest to this woman with the haunted eyes.

"I cannot really foretell; I can only pretend, as MacAllstar bade me do. I may have, betimes, a glint of second sight from my great Aunt Margot; but mostly, I tell thee honestly, 'twill be a rank pretense."

"You are honest as well as fearless," she said. "I am glad to see that is so. Your only danger now is in Mr. Penne, and fearless truth is the only weapon that will affect him. He cannot understand lack of fear, for within himself is a deadly fear. I have come to know that only lately. You will need all your courage and power to reach that fear," she spoke in a voice so soft that Ronald

could hardly distinguish the words. "You must use the knowledge of my coming death! Oh, yes, I know about it and I desire you to use it! You must win there, or—"

She paused. A tremor shook her frame, an involuntary shudder such as a delicate woman must feel at the touch of a loathsome serpent. Barebone Penne was standing just beside her. Without a glance at him, the wan woman turned and reascended the curve of the great stairway. Ronald was aware of one last glance from her somber eyes. Was that look full of fear? Ronald wondered. Not for herself, certainly; she was long past that. Then was it a look of loathing for Penne, or warning for himself?

He became aware of the planter's words, heavy with menace and coldly inhuman in sound. It was strange to hear words of religious hate spoken in that stony voice.

"Dog of a redleg! What do ye at my hall door? I'll have ye scourged until your back be one sore, follower of the scarlet woman."

The boy laughed. It was a spontaneous sound, hearty and free. It brought a spark of amazement into the snake eyes of Penne. Ronald was himself surprised to find that he had for this fanatical little Puritan none of the horror that he had felt when facing the bestial evil in the eyes of the Senegal

black. He suddenly knew that it was not the planter who was the evil force on the place, that he was the master only in seeming, that Penne was himself only a shadow of the power of Lazaire.

"You poppling mannikin! I came to look upon the face of William Halnaker's daughter," Ronald said.

Some emotion stirred in the evil face. Ronald found himself facing a pistol in Penne's hand, and heard Penne's cold voice questioning:

"Why should I not blow ye to death? I have only to say ye attacked me, dog."

Now the boy's Gaelic temper flared. Insult was a thing he had never had to endure.

"You dare not kill me, Crop Head! Nay, press not on the trigger or I shall tell ye that not one peaceful day or night shall ye ever pass after the death of the woman whom ye call wife. She dies. I have the true second sight, and I say it. She dies and four days will tell the tale. When she dies, your last comfort is over; her spirit will haunt ye to the tomb itself for that ye robbed her of home and of joy in life. Two consuming horrors shall hold ye fast until your small dark spirit goes to face a Maker Whose teachings ye have outraged. Your end is hard upon ye, supplanter and thief!"

Now Jem would, indeed, have felt that the little

Laird had again been guilty of trying to ram a stone wall with his head. It was very strange to see into a thing like the planter's soul—strange to see it small and cowering, afraid of ghosts and black magic. That was the spectacle presented to the boy, who had been lifted above all fear and cringing by the mere fact of boldly facing the threatening evils. He watched the struggle in the mind of Penne and felt no inclination to laugh when the little man belted his gun and mumbled, flatly:

"My wife! What tell you of my wife?"

Ronald hated to speak the words that foretold the doom—or was it release?—of the wraith-like woman of the great mansion. Still, he managed a careless sureness of tone.

"Before the moon waxes to its first quarter you will entomb her beside her father and mother. I read in her eyes that she dies on the third day from this."

Penne said only one more word, for it was clear that the man was shaken to the soul.

"Take your orders from Lazaire. Go, lest I change my mind."

A glimpse of a pale face above the stairs, of a warning gesture, made the boy go silently. Well he knew that fear often gave a coward courage to commit evil. Lodged that night in the physician's

cabin, the boy pondered on the fate of the woman in the mansion.

Never since he had left High Bindon had he felt the pain of life gripping his soul as he did when he remembered the utter misery of her face. She stirred his imagination as none other had done. What ghosts haunted the house for her? Had she felt the spirit of her father near, heavy with anger at the evil man seated in an honorable house? Was it possible that even now her knowledge of these guardian spirits was passing to the consciousness of the cold-blooded slave driver?

The boy shook himself. "Nay, I must watch and not allow myself to believe too much in these things. It seems to be a queer new world and I can hardly say where is reality and where is dream. These blacks are so full of strange fancies and whims—especially Lazaire. I must treat him as if he were nothing but a bad boy and not worth taking seriously. 'Tis as ticklish as dancing the sword dance; one must be light and fey not to cut himself on the keen edges."

Ronald never again saw the pale woman who had been Barebone Penne's wife for ten years. On the morning of the fifth day after the death of MacAllstar, the plantation knew that "ol massa's gal" was dead. There was a curious unrest and an undercurrent of something that Ronald

could not read aright. There was fear—or was it hate?—evident in the negroes who were driven by Lazaire's orders to their regular tasks in the field. Ronald, occupied at the mill, became aware that the singing was continuous and that it carried a weird minor note that made the nerves quiver. Ronald knew that a number of whites from other plantations came to attend the funeral of Mrs. Penne.

The great bell tolled a summons an hour before sunset, and all the negroes collected beneath the great palms as a narrow casket was borne from the mansion house to the tomb of the Halnakers, at the edge of the gully, where Ellen's small brothers and sisters lay between the bodies of William and his wife. The mausoleum was a cool and lovely white stone building set in a grove of blossoming orange trees. On its crest a great winged angel looked through the green leaves into the depths of a hot blue sky. Within the pillared enclosure a tomb of white marble stood upon an ebony base. As the narrow casket of Ellen was placed with the bodies of her family, a long shaft of sunlight came like a finger and touched the marble into translucence. Ronald and Jem stood together watching the black-clad figure of the small Puritan standing beside the opened tomb.

"Faith, and if he ha' not the look of a carrion

crow, may I never see bonnie Carlisle Town again," muttered the big, gentle man. "An' 'tis food for thought, lad, that any withholding hand that may ha' been in the great house is removed. Yon cold snake is sole master now of the Halnaker place."

"Evil is his heart and evil only can he do. Still, his own blackness shall recoil upon himself. At the last he shall be his own destruction," Ronald answered, in a tone of such conviction that Jem looked at him fearfully.

There seemed little change, however, in Penne's actions on the plantation after his wife's death. In spite of his pretended religion, he had begun to drink heavily, and being a solitary drinker, he stayed for days on end alone in the wing of the mansion, leaving the plantation more and more to the management of Lazaire. No one but the big Senegal had access to the little man in his office.

CHAPTER V

CHARMS

IT was the night after the funeral that Ronald was awakened by a slight tapping on his shutter.

"Who's there?" His voice was low, for the faintness of the signal suggested secrecy.

"Owen, from Clayton Boons," was the unexpected answer.

From MacAllstar's papers Ronald had learned that Owen, chief bookkeeper at the neighboring plantation of Boons, was the leader of a party that was organizing an insurrection. The boy opened the shutter and a figure slipped into the hut.

"Don't strike a light. Don't speak so as to be heard outside." There was no fear in Owen's voice but there was strength and authority such as befitted a leader of men.

"MacAllstar sent word of you before his death," Owen explained briefly. "With the old doctor dying, there was no one at Beholden we could trust to handle the negroes. He explained that you could be trusted fully. He spoke true. Now I'll tell you without parley, Greaves, we are not planning

a little uprising. The thing extends to every plantation between the Bridge and St. Johns. There are capable white leaders at every place with the negroes under control of their obeah men. We had counted greatly on old MacAllstar, for he was not only a keen old magic worker in his own way but had been made obeah at the negroes' most secret ceremonies where no other white had been admitted. It was slow organizing and his malady had him down before we dared strike. Now we must delay again until you are sure, for Penne's is the keystone of our arch. Its central location and access to the sea make it absolutely necessary. Have you plans?"

"No." Ronald was as direct as Owen. "The negroes are in a queer state of unrest at the death of Mrs. Penne, but I know too little to try to turn this feeling to profit. MacAllstar had things well in hand and left me very clear advice. I am to accept any overtures from the native magicians and get control of them, but I am so ignorant of them personally that I fear to start anything."

"You are wrong," was Owen's positive rejoinder. "In dealing with the blacks, strike at once and fast if you wish to gain them. They are now overawed at your two amazing prophecies—you see news flies fast by underground—and you must crowd your success. You are young but that may in

itself be an advantage if you are bold enough. And I think you are. Your voice would tell me you are no weakling, even if MacAllstar's judgment of a man did not satisfy me completely. Though I fought in the ranks, I know of Sir Hugh Greaves of High Bindon and am ready to trust my life in your hands, boy though you be."

Ronald's voice held a boyish quiver of pride as he answered:

"Your trust, Mr. Owen, will never find betrayal, whatever comes. What do you advise me?"

"Command Lazaire to call a meeting of the negroes in the hills and tell him you will condescend to be present and accept the obeah ceremony. Don't fail in boldness, for that is the only method. You can trust Waunica, the little quadroon who served MacAllstar, with a message to me at any time. She is a safe messenger, for she carries a deep and abiding hate for Lazaire. Most of the negroes are too childlike to harbor any continuous feeling or be worthy of trust."

"How long has this plan been in the making?" asked Ronald.

Owen's voice broke from the low, quiet tone of the conference and in an instant the boy became aware of a volcano of emotion beneath the calm exterior.

"God of Justice! It has always been in the mak-

ing wherever free spirits are slaves! Twice in the five years I have spent in hell the hour has all but struck. How many months or years we have yet to wait, who can say? God give us patience to endure and be ready!"

A hound bayed in the distance. Owen, with a hasty word of farewell, pushed aside the shutter and vanished in the moonless night. Ronald lay awake, listening for sounds that would indicate that Owen had been discovered but silence lay over the fields.

Obeah, the African devil worship, Ronald had learned of thoroughly from MacAllstar's papers. His soul was revolted at the horrors that the quiet little physician had faced so calmly that he might serve his fellow slaves when the need came. Now it was the duty of the little Laird of High Bindon to carry on the service, whatever it might entail. In the darkness and loneliness of the slave hut the homesick lad clenched his fists and set his firm lips in a tight line. Then presently a little laugh echoed in the cell. Then a murmur.

"Aye, Lovelace, ye had the true spirit when you wrote, 'Mirth frees you in captivity.' In truth, it will be much to laugh at to see a Greaves at an African blood-drinking rite. Time's clock turns back, in good sooth."

Ronald found much to enjoy in the plantation

life in spite of the horrors he sensed beneath the surface. At five, when the sun rose over the chalk hills, the outbreak of noisy life was cheerful. With careless abandon the negroes sauntered about their affairs as if it were optional whether they cut canes or whether they only stood and looked at the things of interest about them. No amount of driving by the mulattoes could change this leisurely interest in life. Lazaire, it is true, threw a stillness over any group where he appeared, but the removal of his presence was like the departing of a hawk's shadow from the poultry pen. Black life moved on, ever the same.

The mulattoes, of whom there were comparatively few on Beholden, were the aristocrats of slave life. They worked in the house or in the mill, wore clean print suits, and performed the lighter labors. They were more sullen than the blacks but the girls were graceful of figure and had melting black eyes. All the white slaves of Beholden were set at work in the fields, the deadliest labor in the tropics.

As Ronald came striding from his hut on this morning, humming a Cavalier song that lent a jaunty grace to his step and gave him an air of lordship in spite of his tattered kilts, Waunica paused on her way from the mansion to the sugar shed to give him a smile and a softly spoken "Good

morning." This girl, barely ten, but precocious and keen of mind, was the only person on the whole plantation who had seemed to regard MacAllstar as simply a sick old man to be cherished. Now she looked upon young Greaves simply as a nice young massa to be served.

From the old physician's records Ronald had learned that this girl was a child of Barebone Penne himself by a handsome mulatto, Mary, who had been Mrs. Halnaker's trusted housekeeper. On the day when Penne took Ellen to the Bridge and married her, Lazaire, supposedly by Penne's orders, had attempted to take Mary to his hut. She had resisted so violently that Lazaire, in sudden fury, had beat her so unmercifully that her death followed a few hours after Waunica had been ushered untimely into the world by old MacAllstar. No one had expected the tragically orphaned mite to live, but live she did with an uncannily wise look even in her baby eyes.

Penne and Lazaire seemed not to be aware of her existence and she alone, of all the plantation, was an utterly free and fearless spirit. Perhaps she recognized that spirit in Ronald, for no one else, MacAllstar recorded, had ever seen a hint of a smile in her dark eyes or on her red lips. But there was ever in her glance at Ronald understanding and friendliness.

As Ronald left his song suspended in mid-air to return the girl's greeting, a hubbub near the mill drew the attention of both. The gang of black boys and girls who had been sorting canes with the chatter of a flock of magpies, had been struck suddenly silent. They stood and watched the queer behavior of a negro who came at a stooping run from the mill. Bent over, as if in mortal agony, his mouth hanging open and his eyes starting from his head, he came on until he almost struck against the little quadroon, who regarded him with sad understanding. Becoming aware of her, the black sheered away and ran back and forth in short, uneasy dashes, as if futilely trying to escape Lazaire who, in a cold silence, followed without bluster or threat.

"Pore Cully! Him taken bean poison! Him die ten minutes, mebby! But that old Lazaire get Cully in de cage."

The overseer caught the distracted slave, and clamping a hand over a shoulder propelled him toward a large tree from which hung a basket-like cage. The negro began a most anguished wailing as Lazaire bore him toward the cage. Lifting the man with one powerful arm, Lazaire deposited him within the narrow cage, locked the door and pocketed the key. The dreadful wailing ceased; only a low moaning came from the cage.

"What does it mean?" Ronald demanded of Waunica as Lazaire returned toward the mill, and the hum of industry began again.

"Cully, he careless with dem canes. Lazaire promise he a beating. Cully take poison, so he die and go home to Africa. Lazaire get him in cage so his dupie can't get to his home. Stay always here. Pore Cully! Him dead now!"

The moaning had ceased. It was a habit, Waunica assured Ronald, for the new African slaves to commit suicide and so return to the home from which they had been stolen. Unless the other slaves could see that even death would not free them from Beholden, there would be no keeping them in bondage, for by every cabin door grew the bean whose seed was poison. Cully's body would remain in the cage as a sign of Penne's power over their souls (or dupies) even after death.

Ronald shivered at the thought. Homesickness even unto death possessed these poor blacks, too. Into his mind came a memory of the Scotch hills on a clear fall morning, and the sudden longing that swept over him made him almost envy poor black Cully, whose bondage was over. He shook himself, and catching up his song from mid-air strode over to the mill, caroling with Lovelace:

"Sing out, pent souls, sing cheerfully!
Care shackles you in liberty,
Mirth frees you in captivity!
Would you double fetters add?
Else why so sad?

"Triumph in your bonds and pains
And dance to the music of your chains!"

"Well, Lazaire," Ronald's voice faltered not a whit as the overseer's great bulk towered over him, "it's yourself I desire to chat with about a gathering in the hills at the turn of the moon."

"Sst!" The bold ringing request made in the early morning light seemed to give the obeah man a shock. He hastily strode away into the shade of a pepper tree. His voice dropped into a low grumbling roll.

"You no want neger magic. No need——"

"There's where you are laboring under a great misapprehension, friend Lazaire with the ears of an ape. An obeah dance in the first moon quarter is just what my soul is hankering after. How runs the brew we are to drink?"

Without waiting for answer he began chanting:

"Eye of newt and toe of frog,
Wool of bat and tongue of dog,
Adder's fork and blind worm's sting,
Lizard's leg, and owlet's wing,
For a charm of powerful trouble:
Like a hell-broth boil and bubble."

Ronald narrowed his green eyes and lowered

his clear voice to a queer clairaudient quality as he chanted the witches' song. Lazaire stared at him like a charmed bird at a darting snake's head. Pleased with the effect of his air, the boy continued:

"Witches' mummy; maw and gulf
Of the ravin'd salt-sea shark;
Gall of goat; and slips of yew,
Sliver'd in the moon's eclipse;
Nose of Turk; and Tartar's lips . . . "

"Sst!" the syllable seemed forced from Lazaire's lips as he stared about. "Don't make magic in the sunlight, buckra man! I call obeah meeting in the old woods on the moon change. Lazaire make all good. He show him! Sst!"

With an obeisance the Senegal black hurried away to the field without a backward glance at the slim boy. Ronald laughed low and bitterly.

"Power! Well, it's a queer thing. Magic, as MacAllstar said, is only the power of one mind over another and curious bits of learning may prove valuable means of acquiring it. Thanks to you, old Will, I have found me a powerful magic."

CHAPTER VI

OBEAH

THE half moon was hidden in a band of jet along the western horizon when Ronald Greaves followed a negro guide who had paused outside his door and muttered a word from Lazaire. The rushing wind in the cane was lost when they dropped into the gully that lay behind Beholden mansion, and when they emerged in the path beyond, the way lay among trees whose leaves made a rustling overhead. Ronald was aware of moving shapes about him in the blackness, but though his own white skin was discernible, the forms of the slaves melted in the thick darkness.

How long he climbed, led by an unseen black hand, Ronald never knew; an hour—two hours, perhaps. He was going backward in time instead of upward in space, was the queer idea that came to the boy. Perhaps he would find himself in some prehistoric gathering where he would be a helpless alien.

Presently, turning a corner of a hill, Ronald beheld a glare as of torches dimly seen among

great trees. The low drumming which had been filling his ears, and which he had thought was the wind among trees, swelled into a wild beating of tom-toms as he stepped into a circle of negroes beneath a great cedar tree. Lifted torches flamed luridly about the ring where black men beat with fists on tight skin drums and others rattled shaky-shakies filled with pebbles. Save for the weird signal music, a deep silence wrapped the crowd. Lazaire, stripped to a single red circlet, his skin shining like polished jet in the red light of the torches, sat on a stool on a low, raised platform about the trunk of the ancient cedar tree. It was evidently the high priest's throne.

Ronald strode boldly to the opposite side of the ring and planted himself against a stump that held aloft a great torch. "Where a Greaves sits is the head of the table," he assured himself stoutly.

No mulattoes were in the crowd under the ancient trees. All were blacks, not one of them three generations removed from the tropical jungles of Africa; some of them, indeed, had grown to manhood in Africa, nurtured by the pagan mysteries of devil and snake worship. Their thick lips were now chanting an almost soundless roll of queerly mouthed syllables that mingled with the monotonous beat of the skin drums. The

sound seemed turned back and down by the great trees, to reverberate until Ronald felt that the vast humming of some queer swarming hive surrounded him.

As if his arrival were a signal, or perhaps in response to a sign from Lazaire, two men and a woman projected themselves into the trodden smoothness in the center of the circle.

They were slaves whom Ronald had worked beside in the cane those first days, but he had difficulty in placing them now. Something had been shed from them beside their field clothes. Stripped to the nakedness of African hunters, the men had the lithe grace of black panthers. The woman's one scant garment of scarlet left her free and untrammeled. Gone was the sullen dullness of the slave. Wild vigor and energy swept them as the music swelled. Held to one invisible circle, the three danced in a manner that amazed Ronald and held him breathless and hypnotized with its barbaric vividness. Challenge, pursuit, battle, conquest, were as clearly portrayed as if words had been shouted. The wordless murmur swelled into a roar, the tom-toms rolled in ever wilder incitement, the stone filled bladders rattled crazily, and every black body in the circle swayed in unison with the trio who performed.

Dance followed dance; the hunt, the stalking of

the great jungle beast, the kill, the feasting, followed the mating dance. War, with wild hand-to-hand duels and the blood rites over slain enemies, was pictured, and the crowd was transported into the freedom of the jungles of their memories. Ronald felt that all this playing upon the emotions was leading to a deeper and more intense drama, to worship of evil, perhaps sacrifice to the tribal god. He quivered with something of the helplessness he had felt that first moment he faced the evil power of Lazaire's eyes. This was power, this mass acceptance of primitive emotions, and it was almost a tangible thing.

Without Ronald's becoming aware of it, the clouds had covered the entire sky. A sudden roll of thunder followed a vivid zigzag bladed lightning flash. The torches seemed extinguished and momentary blindness possessed him. Then he saw a new figure upon the dais beside Lazaire, who had risen. She might have materialized from the saw-toothed lightning, so wild and barbaric were her movements. She was a tall negress; even Lazaire's great bulk did not dwarf her. Her upflung arms held something that gleamed evilly in the torchlight, her wild hair swept her face, as she leaped in a frenzy of abandon, like Medusa snakes. There was no question but that her posturing was a promise of offering to some god, whose enmity

must be turned from the black worshipers of the circle.

Ronald, with real astonishment, recognized her as she poised beneath a torch. She was a slave who was called Ganie, a woman of quiet dignity who for fourteen hours every day fed canes into the rollers of the mill. This stripped figure, leaping in a voluptuous frenzy of religious madness, seemed centuries removed from the workaday routine of the plantation. The boy remembered what he had read in one of his Greek books of the Dionysian mysteries, and found that he had no inclination to laugh at this black parody. There was a power let loose in this circle that almost awed him. Had they all traveled backward a thousand years in the blackness of this tropical night?

Again a lightning flash made darkness in the circle, and a scream at his back lifted Ronald Greaves, Laird of High Bindon, erect from his crouching position at the base of the stump. Some frantic body rushed past him across the circle of blacks. Ronald dimly saw the dancing priestess make a swoop from the platform and glimpsed the gleam of her sharp knife through a sweeping arc. Another wild scream of agony trailed into a bubbling wail.

Thunder rolled above the ancient cedars of the

grove, and presently the flaring torches resumed their dim illumination of the drama. Ronald, straining his eyes, crossed the circle and stood beside the group of women who were assisting the priestess with bowls and cups to catch the flowing blood from the sacrificed victim. Dazed, and fearful of what he might see, he suddenly became aware that the body before him was that of a half-grown pig that had escaped the hands of the guarding negro at Beholden and made this spectacular end before the altar of the obeah priestess. Ganie herself was holding out to Ronald a bowl of the hot blood of the sacrifice, and, mindful of MacAllstar's written advice, the boy did not refuse the offered honor. In company with the priest and priestess blacks, he drank from the cup and by this blood rite became an obeah man as well as a worker of buckra magic. His hold upon the slaves of Beholden was now complete.

Ronald never remembered how he returned in a torrential downpour to his hut an hour before dawn. He could never remember that dark meeting in the hills without a shrinking in his soul as if he were looking into a slimy pit where unmentionable foul things crawled. Yet he understood the blacks as he never would have believed it possible for a white man to understand them. They were childlike, controlled only by fear; they were

soft clay in the hands of anyone who could play on their terror-filled imaginations. How could one hope to do them any lasting service? Yet, even with the understanding of their weakness came a protecting compassion. If he had the power that rested in Penne, he would take them out from the dark shadow of Lazaire's domination and give them the simple pleasures that would make their lives happy. Why should they not sing and dance and chatter as garrulously as the monkeys in the cocoanut trees?

"I'd like to run this plantation," he said one night to Jem Holms. "It would be magnificent to have such absolute power over so many human beings. One could do anything in the world with them by kindness and affection."

Jem shook his head. "Maybe so, little Laird, but I can't abide 'em. Now fightin' wi' any kind of white men is work for a man, or hard hauling wi' bare hands on the ropes at sea, but it sickens me to listen at the dumb chatter. It do unman me to live wi' 'em."

Something in his ability to serve these blacks, as well as his own friends, the white slaves, kept Ronald Greaves' soul alive in the hell that Lazaire made of Beholden now that Penne had resigned himself to solitude. But Ronald became hardened, too, for he was obliged to turn away and not see

ugliness that he could not help. The conditions of life in a community so primitive were often unpleasant enough for a fastidious nature. Sometimes he felt as if he had removed and locked away in an iron chest all the refinements that had been so carefully cultivated in him in the old life of the north.

Except for the journal of MacAllstar, who had had a flair for written expression, Ronald had no contact with books or learning. He often wondered if he would find that his early training had vanished. There was, however, one thing that gave him a keen hold on life, and that one thing was the planned uprising of the slaves. If the planters but knew it, they were at this time sitting on a powder magazine. At any moment the slow match which was smouldering its way to the explosive might reach its objective. Ronald's keen mind enjoyed the planning for such a denouement. The great number of Royalists who had been scattered over the island as slaves were of the material that revolutions are made, and the blacks, if they could be managed, were a frightful tool to their hands. In spite of his wrongs, Ronald often shuddered as his vivid imagination pictured the island in the power of the negroes.

Such power as his magic gave him, and such planning as revolution offered to his mind, devel-

oped the boy rapidly. Time passes quickly where work crowds on growth, and three years soon ran their course, with conditions at Penne's Beholden little changed.

CHAPTER VII

WAUNICA

THE eight teams of oxen tramped in a circle from which fine dust rose and hovered over the grinding rollers. Ganie and her ebon associate rose and bent with the regular motion of machine routine, feeding golden canes into the ever hungry mill; the foaming, acrid-smelling juice ran through troughs into the coppers in the furnace room below. Shouting boys and girls raced up the runway from the sorting sheds with arm loads of fresh canes. The regular busy confusion of the mill in its rush season was keeping all hands working at high pressure. The tall young clerk in a white duck suit, who passed through the confusion on his way to the sheds where the hogsheads of brown ripening sugar and kegs of rum were stored, could not be recognized as the slim boy from the ship, *Friend's Adventure*. He had sprung in the amazing manner of adolescent youth into a man's stature. There was a consciousness of power in his carriage. As he turned at a low call from the door, his alert, keen face held a glance of guarded self-confidence.

"Oh, buckra massa!" It was Waunica who called and an urgency in her voice and manner brought every black eye in the shed rolling toward her. Ganie sent a curious glance at the young quadroon. Ganie was Lazaire's woman and there was a malignancy in her look now that was at variance with the serene and dignified manner which was her accustomed bearing in everyday life.

The girl retreated from the shed and Greaves followed her into the white glare without.

"Jem!" The girl's dark eyes sought the fair face before her with pitying fearfulness. None knew as well as she the deep tenderness between big Jem and the clerk. Jem had broken beneath the deadly labor in the field and the brutality about him.

There was lacking in the big gentle laborer that fine spirit that in the Laird of High Bindon was whetted by hardship as a steel blade is sharpened on the stone. Jem had become vacant-eyed and gaunt, cringing beneath the blows of the cart whip. He had seen others of his companions die violent and lingering deaths during the three years of bondage in Penne's Beholden. Jock Babstone had thrown himself in a fury upon the cold-eyed planter one morning and had almost succeeded in snuffing out that dark spirit with bare hands before a

pistol shot made carrion for the vultures that hovered always over the gully.

"What of Jem?"

Ronald's tone was sharp. Another would have fallen away in fear before the blaze of his eyes, but Waunica came closer and watched him with tender concern. Three years had turned the little quadroon maid into a woman. She had cared for the young clerk as she had for the old physician, and she showed always to him something of the possessive tenderness that a favored servant manifests.

"Lazaire got he in them stocks." It was clear she dreaded the effect of her message. In a moment Ronald was gone. The girl stood watching his progress across the open space, toward the wicker-like ox stable that stood beneath a great tamarind tree. The flogging stocks were beyond the stables. A slave, left helplessly hanging there after a flogging that left the skin in strips on his back, needed no further torture. The hordes of stinging flies that settled soon turned him into a maniac.

Ronald had sensed, during the past months, Lazaire's struggle to withstand the fear of the white magic. Confident in his physical power, and in his obeah hypnotism, Lazaire had reluctantly accepted the overrule of the slight boy. One threat, however, had force to make him cringe—the fear of

the worm. But of late his resistance to Ronald had grown, and the boy felt that some compact with Barebone Penne had caused this increase in his daring. If Lazaire had now attacked Jem it was a declaration of war, and a serious one.

The sight that met Ronald's eyes as he turned the corner of the stable made him spring forward with a wild yell that was startling. Lazaire wheeled around and was met by a whirlwind that snatched from his hand the bamboo flail he was wielding with devastating effect on Jem's bared back. The negro gave a bellow of rage and grasped at the white figure whose wiry arms now began using that flail over the overseer's head and shoulders. The great black hands could not close over the slim form that flashed about, making lightning strokes that found their mark, nor could an African-reared jungle man face the flash of those strange green eyes now flaming with anger. He could not withstand the Gaelic curses which rolled from a mouth that was a straight line above a square chin, curses uttered in a clear incisive voice in time to the cutting flail of the bamboo rod, each stroke of which removed a strip of skin. Not even the rage of hate and jealousy in his heart, nor the confidence in the support of his master, could support the negro, descendant of kings though he was. Lazaire broke into a shambling run, and was pur-

sued by the angry young Scot until the bamboo was a mass of splinters.

When Ronald removed the pin that held the stocks, Jem fell in a helpless heap. He was too heavy for the youth to lift, but Ronald became aware that Waunica was beside him, holding a basin of water with an aromatic drug in it.

"Wet he head and back; then he walk," was her soft advice.

The two ministered to Jem as he groaned his way back to consciousness, and then supported him into Ronald's cabin.

"Leave he to Waunica, buckra massa; I wash he well." Then in a casual aside she added, "That Lazaire, he try take Waunica for he woman, pretty quick."

"What? That beast! Penne would not let—"

At Ronald's exclamation of horror, she lifted mournful dark eyes. The girl was a lovely thing in the half light of the hut. Her hair, softly curling, stood about her head like a black halo. Her yellow dress glowed and revealed her delicate beauty as she bent over Jem's flayed back. Her low tone was full of scorn and hate. "Penne! He drunk night and day. He no good!"

Ronald saw her with new eyes. Her friendly kindness had surrounded him with unexpected comforts during the three years that he had han-

dled the accounts of the sugar shed. The little quadroon's domineering protection, the boy had rather taken for granted. He had thought of her as a child, as the wee maid, perhaps, of MacAllstar's prophecy. He had been unaware that she had become a woman, with the sudden flowering of the tropics. The thought of her young beauty fouled by Monkey-Ear was a horror not to be faced. It must be prevented. A successful uprising would change things. And now, surely, the hour was at hand!

"Listen! You go to Owen at Clayton Boons. Tell him to-night, at midnight. The moon is full, the hour has struck."

"I go after I care for this buckra man," she promised.

Ronald returned to his work with a mounting rage in his heart. To-night the thing must succeed. Time after time, one ill after another had delayed the uprising. Lazaire was now definitely trying to regain all the power over the blacks and discredit white magic. Perhaps the boy's youthful self-confidence in his personal power had caused him to lose some of his hold on the superstitions of the slaves. As he looked back he realized that Lazaire had been quietly increasing the obeah meetings, which Ronald had refused to attend, and as Penne had become sunk in drug indulgence Lazaire's

power had strengthened. From Waunica the boy knew that Penne was haunted by visions of his wife roaming about the mansion and never felt secure unless his spirit was fortified by a drug, and even then he seldom left his office in the ell.

Now, for the fourth time, the plans for the uprising were set. Word had come from Owen last night that the hour alone remained to be fixed; would Ronald set it from his book of stars?

That day, as the negroes came to the shed with bundles of cotton, Ronald spoke a word to each that set the black eyes rolling. Then over the plantation of Beholden began to ring a hymn taught to the slaves in Sabbath meetings, but now sung with a change of wording that would have startled any planter in the island. It was being echoed in all the holdings along the coast.

"Oh, my good friend Jesus, make we free!
God Almighty thank ye! God Almighty thank ye!
God Almighty make we free!
Buckra massa, make we free!
What neger for to do? What neger for to do?
Take by force! Take by force!
To be sure, to be sure, to be sure!"

The phrase, "take by force," was the watchword of the uprising. As the sun rolled westward that fatal day the song rang and rolled about the fields with the joyous abandon of a madrigal. Ronald found himself wondering how it could be possible

to accomplish any permanent success with such child-like minds, but a glance at the sullen mouths of the blacks as they eyed their hated overlords, the mulattoes, made him admit that the weapon would be deadly if not altogether dependable.

As the sun dropped, a golden ball, into the western sea, Ronald stood in the upper doorway of the mill, high enough to command a view of the sweep of the blue water. A vessel, flying the Dutch flag, was dropping anchor near the gull rock a mile or so off shore. The breeze brought the grating roll of the anchor chains and the voices of seamen calling. This was not an unusual thing, for a ship did not run carelessly at dark into any West Indian harbor in these days.

"The *Gros Gustalphus* of Amsterdam, no doubt," thought the boy. "Would I were aboard her and out at sea!"

A great sickness swept him for a moment. The Puritan Cromwell was dead. That news had come two years before to Bridge, but the white slaves were still bound by their sentence. If he were but free, how easy to get home to High Bindon, to ride the windswept hills with horse and hound! Lazaire's bull voice, from the direction of the mansion, roused him to the immediate need. Jem must be prepared for the night's work.

Darkness had fallen at the dropping of the sun's

ball. A chill wind wrapped Ronald in a cold depression.

Jem had recovered sufficiently to help in the work of the night. His back had been bandaged in some healing unguent and sleep had refreshed his spirit. The dullness and apathy of despair rolled away at the dream of freedom and home. Jem could fight when a chance came.

Ronald insisted that both must sleep for some hours. Jem was to sleep in his own hut in the fields so that he could give the word to the blacks when the hour struck, and also to allay suspicion should Lazaire visit the quarters.

CHAPTER VIII

ESCAPE

IT was the faintest of whispers in his ear that wakened Ronald: "Massa!" He started up and a soft hand was laid warningly over his mouth.

"All over, little buckra massa! No speak to Waunica. She tell 'um all." The girl's voice was faint but she held the boy quiet by her urgent tone. "Me came to Boons and see buckra Owen on them wheel!"

"Wheel!" Ronald's voice broke. After ten years of hell to be broken at last on a wheel! Owen, their leader, dead!

"He look at Waunica when she go by and say just that loud, 'All over!' No speak more. Waunica must be quiet. Listen, Eboa Jack, he Owen's man. He told the plan to Mary Wiggins, she Jack woman! She jealous of that neger. She go to Clayton with that whole story. Clayton he put Eboa Jack on the wheel and he talk before he die. Waunica come fast back to Beholden to warn little massa."

The girl stopped for so long that Ronald again attempted to rise. Her voice held him, though it

was fainter. She continued. "Waunica went in mansion house to Missy Ellen's room. Often Waunica dress in white and walk them stairway and round and round them big salon. Buckra Penne he think it Missy Ellen's dupie. So Waunica hear Lazaire and Penne talk."

"Oh! So it is you who has reduced Penne to a gibbering drug fiend? Fine work, little maid!" The praise in the tone stirred the girl to tears and warm moisture fell on Ronald's hands. Her voice continued with an urgent hurry. "Waunica came to listen, and heard Lazaire tell Penne that all been found out. Soldiers come from town at sunrise. They will kill little massa and all buckra slaves on Beholden. Lazaire—" The voice died away.

"Go on, Waunica. Tell me about Lazaire. I must do something at once. Warn Oldshare at Bluefields and Pendergast at Aldcock's."

"No need. They been taken. Only need soldiers for magic obeah buckra massa." There was a touch of pride in the faint voice. "Lazaire him tell Penne him mus' have Waunica for him share. Penne say, 'Take yellow brat!' "

"Beast!" Ronald sat up. The girl was crouching on the floor.

"Then Waunica feel strong hand over her neck and door opens. It was Ganie. She drag Waunica

into office to Lazaire and Penne. 'Here dat dupie,' Ganie tell 'em. Penne he very mad at Waunica. Lazaire him very mad at Ganie. She dare Lazaire take another woman. He knock her down and kick her hard. She draw knife and jump to cut he. He take knife and kill Ganie. She dead."

At sunset all this had happened. The world seemed in shambles. Ronald groaned, sickened to the soul. "Then—" he prompted.

"Then Penne laugh, that first laugh since Missy Ellen she die. 'Take her, Lazaire. I free man once again,' he say. Then Lazaire he take Waunica to he cabin." There was a deadly note in the girl's voice.

"I'll kill him now." The boy rose from his couch and tried to lift Waunica. She hung in his arms a dead weight, though so slight. With a sigh she let him lift her to the couch.

"That Monkey-Ear he very dead now," she breathed. "Waunica she die very quick, little Massa. Hold she hand just little while!"

Ronald sat down and held the small hands close as the words became so soft as to be almost inaudible.

"Lazaire, he want drink after while. He say Waunica must drink same cup. So she drink, too. She all time carry little cassava worms under she nail. Lazaire he get much and Waunica she get

some. He die pretty quick. Waunica she die now." The voice ebbed away and the form relaxed. Ronald laid her softly on his couch and bent over her. One last word murmured in his ear as he touched the cold, soft cheek. "Little buckra massa!"

Soldiers at sunrise to shoot the white slaves! Of the slaves from the *Friend's Adventure* only Jem and himself remained. The others had died. Jem! To-night they must escape. Only a brief space before sunrise to reach safety.

Ronald, in his old short plaids, again the Laird of High Bindon, hurried down the dusty lane by the logwood hedge. The great white moon made the sea silver. The shadow of a ship lay on the shimmering moonpath.

"Jem!"

In a moment Jem stood in the pale light beside Ronald.

"All is discovered! Everything is lost!" Almost as an echo to the words a hideous clangor rent the silver moonlight. It was the great gong that called the slaves to meet in the yard. Ronald remembered a clanking he had heard as he came down the lane.

"Barebone has found Lazaire dead. The police have come from the Bridge. Come quickly, Jem! We have only one chance — maybe not half a

chance—but we will take it."

The blacks were streaming up the lane in response to the summons. As the last loiterers passed them Ronald set off at a run toward the sea. "We'll swim out to the Dutch merchantman, Jem. That's our one chance. It's only three miles and the sea is calm as a floor."

As the great bell continued its clangor the two fugitives slipped into the molten silver of the ocean and struck out for the dark bulk of the vessel that lay in the shimmering moonpath.

A long time later Ronald lifted himself high in the water and tried to locate their mark. "We've swung too far south," he muttered. "Turn to your right, Jem. There she lies. We'll make it in another half hour."

"Queer. She seems drifting," he said a little later as the dark bulk seemed suddenly nearer.

Their breath was coming in gasps from the long pull and their ears were listening to the outbreak of yells and shots from the shore, when they caught the carving at the base of the great rudder of the dark vessel. They wearily began to climb her stern just as the sudden daybreak of the tropics whitened the east.

As their heads cleared the cabin gallery a sudden racking roar shook the vessel.

"My God!" The two stared from the windows

of the empty cabin across decks crowded with crouching fighters whose eyes were fixed upon a fair merchantman, now rolling under the impact of the broadside just fired from the vessel they had boarded.

"Out of the pot into the flames!" Ronald gave a laugh that held no hint of mirth. "We've boarded a pirate, Jem, that is taking the Dutchman as a prize. We need worry no more about those knaves at Beholden. We have other troubles."

BOOK THREE

The "Azure Rood"

CHAPTER I

THE "SANCTA MADRE"

"CANST cease thy eternal polishing of that cannon, Ivemay, awhiles to tell this lunkhead Mortimer what happens to him who thinks to supply brains to our Captain?"

A short, barrel-bodied man turned from the shining brass ten-pounder that stood in the bow of the *Azure Rood.*

"He'll feed fishes following our next brush with the Dons, no doubt. 'Tis monstrous unlucky to question the wisdom of Captain Redlegs—unlucky any way you take it."

"Lucky Redlegs may be," was the surly rejoinder of the thin man who sat sharpening his knife to a feather edge. "Aye, but luck is a fickle jade at best and any man's may change. And why should I not talk? The Free Companions always decide by vote what course they shall pursue."

The round gunner waddled over and stood straddled before the speaker. "Whatever the Free Companions may or may not do, every man on the *Azure Rood* knew when he sailed that Redlegs is the law on his own ship. He gives orders and we

follow him to hell. Aye, and through the gates of hell, for well we know that his red boots would saunter safely out again if he chose to visit the devil hisself. Ye did so agree yourself, Mortimer, and had ye not so agreed, Redlegs could have picked half a hundred other men in your place, as ye well know, and—" here the gunner's broad face was thrust down to within a foot of Mortimer's thin lips, "and let me hear but another word against the Captain's luck and over ye go to the pretty gold fishes and saw-nosed sharks. We have no talk of ill luck on board this vessel. 'Tis tempting Fate. Had ye not known your own-self that Captain Redlegs has never lost a battle nor failed on a quest 'tis not likely ye would ha' jumped so gladly at a chance to sail with the *Rood* to the Spanish mainland. Look ye now, Mortimer, whilst I tell ye the tale of the fight with the *Sancta Madre*. That was a day and a night to make a song about."

A clear bugle call rang out from the poop and the group about the gunner turned quickly toward the steps. Across the waist of the gently rolling vessel could be seen a tall man with a trumpet at his lips.

" 'Tis Dependence Ellery calling for his music practice. Go along, Mortimer, and bang away on your drum. And as ye bang, remember I'll bang

your head on the oak rail if ye talk any more of ill luck or discontent. The music of the waits may be not so bad for showing the Spaniards we are laughing in their teeth," the gunner grumbled as he returned to his brass work, "but my little pets are better music when it comes to close quarters, no one dare dispute. I ha' the last word there."

The gleaming ship rolled slowly to the gentle wash of blue waves. The fragrant breeze made but a soft singing in her cloud of canvas. From her forepeak and mainmast the floating banners showed no arms save a cross of blue emblazoned on a white field. Her captain claimed no country's protection, but there was no mistaking the fair Saxon faces that made up the large part of the crew that stepped smartly about her decks. There was no slackness in the *Rood's* discipline at any time. Yet, save for her lack of country's flag none would have dreamed that the *Azure Rood,* with her high stern structure of gilt and blue, her snowy decks, her mass of bellying sails white as the clouds piled by the steady trades in the blue Caribbean sky, was a pirate ship, so famous that any rogue in Tortuga was glad to sign on for a voyage under her captain, known in all the Spanish isles as Captain Redlegs. Her only betraying insignia was a wide band of black about her hull,

punctuated by sinister round portholes which, under Ivemay's efficient generalship, could belch an inferno of death that had sent many a stately galleon to a deep sea resting place.

The mate from the poop rail watched the party of men who gathered about Dependence on the deck below. Smartly uniformed in blue, like the crew of a ship of the line, each carried with an air of pride a drum or a viol, a fife or a sackbut, and ranged about the tall, lank figure of Ellery for the morning music practice.

The black-bearded mate turned toward the steps leading to the great cabin. The high, carved woodwork of the ship's stern was gleaming with gilt paint freshly laid on by a one-armed sailor whose leering mouth was lifted by a sword cut that ran from temple to lip in a perpetual sneer that showed strange gaps in his teeth. As he wielded his brush he sang, in a roaring voice, an obscene ditty wherein were recounted the charms of certain jades of Port Royal.

The mate sent a curt order across to the singer.

"Avast there, Chessman! Pipe down! Himself is in the cabin, belike at his books."

The ballad died to a faint rumble as the villainous mouth widened to a grin and the rolling eyes sent a fearful glance downward toward the windows of the cabin.

With another glance about, from the watch on the top of the mainmast to the busy decks, the mate plunged down to the door of the cabin. It seemed empty, that rich cabin of the *Azure Rood,* as big Jem entered it.

The shining, polished woodwork was beautifully inlaid with mother-of-pearl and the cabin trimmings were of silver. Spread across the back of a carved walnut chair lay a cloak of rich blue velvet lined with flame satin. A scarlet macaw, perched on the post of the chair, erected his tall crest and called harshly. The call startled from his nap in the velvet cloak a small gold and white spaniel who sat up expectantly and fixed his amber eyes upon the big mate.

"So, ho! Don Philip! An big Jem brings not your lump of sweet cake, what a sad wee doggy 'ud be, eh, my pretty?"

The tiny pink tip of a tongue appeared under the black button of a nose. Jem laid a bit of cake on that jet button just as the rear door of the cabin swung open and Captain Redlegs, of the *Azure Rood,* came in from the gallery, which extended across the stern of the cabin.

The spaniel, his cake swallowed, gave a flying leap to the floor and danced about his master as if the separation had been one of weeks instead of minutes.

"Poor Philip, Jem is fattening thee for an early grave. Alas! perchance we can recognize the value of the discipline of denial no better than can thy small brain. We all yearn for the fleshpots, eh, Jem!"

The Captain of the *Azure Rood* might easily have been mistaken for a young gallant from an effete court. Under his wide hat of dark beaver, gold-red curls fell over his shoulders. His suit was of dark blue taffety, and was quite plain save for the sheer Spanish lace that fell over his hands. Boots of fine blood-red Cordovan leather came well up over his slim thighs and matched the plume that swept about his hat. A second glance at his tanned fair face, however, would make one reconsider a hasty estimate of his character.

There was power in the line of the lean jaw, in the set of the firm lips; and the glance of the wide open eyes of grey-green shot with hazel lights struck one with a sense of power, of self-confidence oddly at variance with the smoothness of that fair face and the deceptive slimness of the youthful body.

Captain Redlegs was barely twenty-two, but his five years' sailing of the Caribbeans had given him a certain fame, and the well oiled discipline of his ship told of unusual force and personality under that foppish exterior. The tough war dogs

that made his crew took a curious pride in the evident rank and fastidiousness of their commander. He could have filled the *Azure Rood* with thrice as many as his picked crew of sixty, all willing to swear the instant obedience that was the unfailing requirement in the contracts of his men. He could have made his choice because he was held by all the hardened buccaneers and pirates at Tortuga to be the very button on Fortune's cap. In spite of his squeamish dislike for scenes of blood and torture, which was forgiven the son of a noble Cavalier, no foray where his golden curls had led the way, no fight on shipboard or on land where his ringing laugh had punctuated his swordplay had ever failed of its objective.

For three years the *Azure Rood,* when returning to Tortuga, had been laden with treasure, with a crew well-fed, well-found, and ready, it is true, to plunge into wild debauches of gaming and drink. But they were always ready to sign again for a cruise with Redlegs, willing to follow his lead into any desperate fight, willing even to restrain, for the sake of his foolish scruples, from sating their lust for blood and rapine and torture.

Such was Ronald Greaves, five years after his escape from Beholden. He had taken the "bit things about him," as old MacAllstar had advised,

and had builded himself as good a life as he was able. A man of no country, piracy had been forced upon him. He had ameliorated that profession as much as possible, making for himself on his own ship a little space of order and cleanliness and beauty where he might pursue his natural scholarly tastes for weeks on end. The occasional wild forays against wealthy settlements of New Spain, the fierce fights with gold laden galleons, thrilled his blood with the intoxications of power and success, but they were not his life. They were but the interruptions of it, like the violent hurricanes that flailed the Caribbean but left it more serenely calm in the tropical languor which is its natural state.

"We should make Cayos de Palmas by sunset, if we do not sight the galleon, Jem. Fairly between Margarita and Trinidad we can hardly miss her. 'Tis said she will have all the Lima plate."

Captain Redlegs had seated himself with a languid grace before the great table. He held Don Philip on his knee and idly pulled at the silky gold and white ears while he studied a map spread out before him. It was a curiously pictured map of the Caribbean with its thousand spicy islands and the shore of the Spanish Main from Yucatan to Trinidad at the mouth of the Orinoco. It had been made by Redlegs himself and was beautifully dec-

orated with red-roofed Spanish towns lying under southern cordilleras, with open-jawed sea monsters destroying castaways, and with gilded and purple-sailed galleons and galleasses. Despite these ornate decorations, the map was accurately projected as to latitude, longitude and scale of miles.

Now, as it lay on the table, it was held down at each side by morocco bound volumes of poetry; Spenser and Dante succeeded by Moliere and Lope de Vega, for the Laird of High Bindon had a catholic and tolerant taste and recognized no national boundaries for genius. In his intervals at Tortuga and Port Royal he had found the acquisition of books and luxuries from the French and English colonies not difficult. So he lived the life of a prince on his preposterously beautiful pirate ship, and his hardened buccaneers bathed themselves with eastern perfumes and gamboled as clumsily as a kennel of playful mastiffs with blue silk ribbons about their necks.

The music of the orchestra, drilled by Dependence Ellery, came cheerily from the deck. Ellery had once been an Inward Light preacher in Carlisle, but had been shanghaied and barbadosed by Tiger Baldwin.

"Dost ever think of the bonny hills of Esk and Teviotdale, Jem? How often I do! Did we dream when we swam to the Dutch merchantman that

we would spend our lives chasing Spanish galleons through these seas? One thing I have learned from life, Jem, is to distrust Fortune when she seems to offer freedom. So free she lets us seem, but fettered fast we find ourselves by the senseless pranks of luck. Had we reached Holland, as we planned, on the Dutchman, we had ridden home safe and sound in Charlie Stuart's train, with glory for our sufferings for the Cause."

"Aye, sir, in the King's own army would ha' been the proper place for yourself. I would ha' liked swinging an axe at his home-coming."

"And now, Jem, a rope's end awaits us both as buccaneers, freebooters, and harriers of the Spanish, who, it seems, have managed to conclude a peace with Charles."

Both Captain and mate grew silent as the mind of each turned to the cold gray land of the far north. Both sighed deeply.

" 'Tis all but ten years." Jem's voice was husky. "Margot Graeme was to ha' wed wi' me come Michaelmas. She mun think me dead the long years. No doubt she says a prayer for me."

"My mother watches the hill road." Captain Redlegs' voice echoed the longing that was in Jem's. From the vest of his silk suit Redlegs drew a trinket, a rood azure, fleury with gold. He was thinking of a wee maid with eyes of blue who had

asked a boy to be her loyal knight and had given him a token. She would be a bonny lass now, the Lady Janice.

"One must think of Fortune as a lady." The Captain loved to air his whimsical philosophy to Jem. "She is so fickle-minded, and it is so impossible to fight against her wishes. Turn her the pleasant smile when she smites your cheek, and more like than not she will forego her shrewishness and smile sweetly upon you. At all events a man can assert his superiority to her by the simple process of ignoring her storms. Ride on the keen edge, for in time she is bound to change and then one can o'erleap her buffeting. So, Jem—"

"Land! Ho-o-o-o!"

The music had stilled on deck and the thin cry from the mainmast watch came in at the cabin windows. Jem hastened up the steps and Redlegs, waiting but to fling the blue coat about him, followed. The sun was dropping into the west. Dead ahead, as the *Azure Rood* made southward, lay a distant purple fleck on the blue of the sea. The wind had stiffened; the sails made a great singing and flapping as the ship raced toward the dot which the captain knew to be the lonely and empty Cayos de Palmas, in whose lee he planned to lurk until the galleon from Cartagena came into view.

"Eh, look at 'un wi' the fat poodle under 'un's arm. Why can he not put off such womanish faldoodles and play the proper man?"

"Still a-glummin', Mortimer?" The broad gunner leaped from his seat on the main deck where the men off watch were lounging. "Fat poodle do ye label that wee dog? Then listen to the story of Don Philip. Ye would be very wise not to make such a word before any officer on this ship. We have all sailed with Captain Redlegs since the death of Broad Bart Archer off Porto Bello gave the *Bloody Jane* to Redlegs. Did none ever tell ye how yon fat poodle, as ye misname him, came to be known as the Luck o' the *Rood?*"

"Na, nor do I give any thought to lucky poppets and such like trash, Charles Ivemay. A cutlass and a sharp knife to slit a throat are the luck trinkets for a true brother of the Coast." The saturnine Mortimer continued to whet his knife.

"It was off the shore of Barbados—" Ivemay was launched on his tale and heeded no interruptions. He knew how the freebooters loved a sea tale, and more especially if it recalled their own exploits. The group were hanging on his words with impatient scowls and imprecations for Mortimer—"where we were slipping down on a tall Dutch merchantman at the peep o' day. We fired our bow guns as a warning just as a great roaring

came across to us from the Bridge, a league away.

" 'The Spaniards are attacking the fort,' calls Broad Bart from the poop. 'Leave the hare and after the tiger.' It was a hip and hurrah, for the Dutchman we could take at our leisure and a galleon meant plate and riches for all.

"Aye, she was a prize, that *Sancta Madre*! I bought me a yellow maid and lived like a lord in Port Royal for a six month after," declared Peter Laffery, who smacked his lips about a long Dutch pipe which was never out of his mouth save when he slept. He was as lean and hard as Ivemay was round and bluff and they always fought side by side, looking like a bulldog matched with a wolfhound, and what the one could pull down the other could hold relentlessly.

"We slid alongside that galleon," Ivemay continued, "and she so busy on her lee side that not a man jack watched the sea until us had grapplers ready to cast. Then, when Broad Bart yelled at me, 'Ivemay, over wi' 'em!' a voice like a silver bugle rang in my ear, 'Lend me, I pray, but one of those pistols that like a lady's buckler girds thee about so stoutly,' and ere I could so much as back away, two of my good guns jumped from my belt into the hands of what manner of creature I knew not at all. He was all naked save for a wisp of a breechcloth, and yellow elf locks were

wet plastered over his face like a drowned sea maiden. One gun he passed to his shadow, a man-thing, naked, too, but black and hairy, and when he looked at my face he gave a wild eldritch laugh and over he went into the galleon like a flying fish, crying, 'Ho! for High Bindon! Come on, ye hunting dogs, the stag's at bay.' Some such words he calls and all the brethern burst into a roar of laughing and over they rushed fairly carrying me along wi' them after them two witchmen."

"Aye, over we went," agreed Peter, solemnly, "with Broad Bart yelling, 'What hell game do ye be playing, you! Is it a mermaid ye be following?' 'Take but another look, Captain dear,' I says, 'and ye'll see it be the elf king hisself that's goin' ahead of your hearties.' "

"Now, Peter, do you be telling the tale or do I finish it?" Ivemay's tone was patiently complaining.

"I could be telling it better, at that," said Peter, calmly, "but on wi' ye, Charles. 'Tis good for ye to practice on the fine points."

"Man, but the eldritch laugher could fight! The papists shrank away from him and crossed their selves when he laughed in their faces and fired his pistol. The banshee grabs the sword of the first man he shot and then he runs fair wild. Straight across the deck to the guns he leads, then

up and down the waist he fought hand to hand. I kept always alongside that white slip and his black shadow, for I did be expecting him to stop a musket ball or flesh a sword, him so white a mark in the morning sunlight, and I did be wanting to see would he vanish in thin air or in a flash of fire, maybe, if he were the devil's own."

"And had he been that, Charles, ye know sure that none but a silver bullet could ha' stopped him. I was fair touching him when a sword ripped along his white thigh and his blood ran red as your own bull carcass could spout, Charles." Peter's comments were evidently essential to Ivemay's tales.

"Aye," he agreed, "I saw that same and how the Laugher ran him through as neatly as Sam, the cook, spits a fowl. He was lightning fast—and why should he not be?—with no weight of armor such as the Spanish wear nor any weapon save the sword he had captured, for he had flung my good pistol at a Spanish head as soon as he had emptied it.

"And all this while the fine Spanish Don stood like an image on his poop, waving a silver hilted sword and giving orders his men had no time to heed, for by now we had them scrambling overboard or down the gangways into the gun decks. Then the poppet, his hair dry now and shining in the sun, stood before the poop and called to the

Captain in a voice as fine as if he were all clad in inlaid armor and flaunting plume like the grandee hisself instead of all naked save for his slit and bloodied bit of rag. He said it in Spanish fine and fair.

" 'If you will please to strike your colors, sir, I will endeavor to secure you honors of war.' So he called to the Don.

" 'Never shall Don Josepha Perriez yield to English dogs of pirates or naked savages,' the Captain answered him.

" 'Now that is a right uncourteous reply and I shall need to teach thee, Don Josepha Perriez, not to judge a gentleman by the cut of his coat.' Then the mannikin flapped the shreds of bloody rag about his middle and make a flying leap to the poop where a few Spanish soldiers had been busy trying to unship one of the poop guns and train it to sweep the waist.

"Broad Bart had come aboard with the reserves just as this gun was finally fired. It smashed into a huddle of Spaniards who were erupting from a forward hatch from the guns below and saved us from sticking them.

" 'Fine it is!' says Bart. 'Between yon poppet and the Spanish shooting of theirselves, we are like to get this galleon at last, I do be thinking, Ivemay. Smiler, take thou ten men and clear the

poop and fetch me that fine Spanish grandee.'

"So the Smiler rushed the steps and being met by the men who had fired the poop gun was delayed for a bit while we watched the yellow-haired poppet face the don who was commander of the ship."

"I've seen many a fine swordsman in my time, both in the low countries and in France," offered Laffery again. "That Don Josepha was Toledo trained and no coward. When he saw the slim boy, and him all naked, the don loosed his mail shirt and cast it down, fighting only in his thin silk which he plucked open to show he wore no chain beneath. I do declare it was but luck that gave him to the boy. Bleeding he was from his thigh, this lad, and he slipped in a pool of his own blood just as Don Josepha would ha' surely spitted him. Then from the deck the poppet sent up his arm and his blade thrust the Don through from groin to armpit."

Ivemay took up his tale as if Laffery had not spoken.

"I had gone up the other steps and Smiler had finished wi' the gunners and was all ready for the grandee when he came up to find him dead, and the naked lad, flourishing the grand silver-hilted Toledo sword, was standing in the door of the great cabin wi' his shadow, the big hairy man, still

beside him. A bit of a lad stood by the table, staring aghast at the death of the grandee. To him came rushing a very beautiful lady, crying, 'The ship is taken, Miguel!' Then, when her eyes fell on the naked two in the door, she shrieked afresh. 'They be savages!' Then the poppet gave another laugh but he bowed low with a great flourish of the sword as if its flashing hilt might cover up his nakedness, and then they two hastily came away and let Smiler into the cabin. A flapping shadow called the Laugher's eyes aloft and no sooner saw he the golden banner of Spain at the masthead than he ran like a monkey up the rigging, cut the ensign loose, and came sliding down a stay to where Broad Bart stood on the main deck watching all that passed with his cold blue eye."

"Aye, the youngling flapped his wings and crowed a bit," Laffery took up the tale. "He wrapped hisself in the silken banner and made his grand bow to Bart. 'We've got you the ship, I believe, sir,' he said, with his heels together and the grand sword at salute. Broad Bart had looked him well over, for an all-seeing eye had the old 'un.

" 'Redlegs, eh?' Bart grunted. 'An I set ye two ashore 'twill be to ha' two letters burned wi' a hot iron on your white foreheads.'

" 'Ye mistake there, sir. They brand not dead men, and not alive shall we return to Barbados.'

" 'Will ye follow the Freebooters, then,' said Bart, 'and ship on the *Bloody Jane*?'

" 'I'll follow no man,' the young cock crowed again proudly, and in his cloth o' gold suit he well looked the grandee his own self. 'An yon be your practice with helpless lads whose mother's milk is still wet on their lips, I'll ne'er lead another boarding party for ye, sir.'

"Smiler had pistoled the young Spanish sprig when he had made to resist Smiler's grasp and the lady was screeching again, trying to throw herself on the boy's body.

"Then did Broad Bart throw back his head and laugh most hearty, and every Companion on the deck that heard the youngling did so likewise."

When Laffery paused to draw upon his pipe, Ivemay again seized the tale, and the faces of the listeners turned to him. "And the decks rang with loud guffaws, yours and mine, Peter, louder than all the others, for we someway felt that he was our own discovery, like. There he stood, not so old by years as the Spanish lad he was calling a babe, an' he had run like a flame over the whole galleon, killing the commander and wrapping his bloody, lady-slim body in the proud golden flag of Spain.

" 'All right, my bully boy,' said Broad Bart when he could speak for laughing, 'find your own place amongst the company, so you leave me to run my own ship.' Then he yelled at the Smiler: 'And did I say for ye to strip the cabin? Leave the prisoners there till I order them to the deck.' "

" 'Tis a proper fine tale and a bloody one, but no fat poodle for a lucky charm ha' ye explained at all." Mortimer sheathed his knife and buckled it at his waist. "Had Captain Redlegs o' the *Azure Rood* not been a known fighter would I be signed on with ironclad articles, think ye?"

"Aye, the doglet, Don Philip. Do you be patient, Mortimer, for 'tis a long tale that comes not to its end, and this one will end long ere the *Rood* anchors at Cayos de Palmas.

"When the lady let out another screech as Smiler plucked her from her young brother's dead body, where it lay beside that of Don Josepha—her older brother he was, as we found later—this wee white and gold spaniel dog came running out from the cabin, barking like a child's willow blowgun and set his puppy teeth into Smiler's bare heel. The whole deck rang with guffaws again, and Smiler let out a yell of anger at the shame o' being eaten by such a whiffet, and he yanked the puppy up by the ear, it snarling and spitting like a powder squill alight. Since he was still holding

on to the shrieking Spanish lady, Smiler could only give the doglet a left-handed toss, and over it went into the sea.

"Then the boy cried again, 'That wee dog, for its size, is the most courageous heart on the whole galleon. By my troth! I love gallantry where-e'er I find it.'

"Then he plucks off his golden banner and gives it a wrap around his big black-bearded companion what, as everyone can say, had not made so much as a sound, and I was wondering did he be a poor dumb one, maybe, though all had seen him fight as hard as the best of the *Bloody Jane's* crew —and none would call us babes! Then the Laugher plunged headlong over the rail into the sea after the little dog. Sooner than you could lay hold of a line he came again with the whiffet balanced on his shoulder, the both of them dripping. 'See, Jem, the Luck o' the Laird,' says he to the black one.

" 'Laird, say you?' spoke up Broad Bart, for he was not one to miss any small thing.

" 'Nay,' laughed the boy. 'I am Sir Redlegs. And if I may have the sword and dog and banner as my share of the spoils of this galleon, I'll join you, sir, for as long as your ventures please me.'

"His uppity ways were just the sort that would please Broad Bart, so the lad and his shadow

shared alike with us all the gold and silks and fine gewgaws of which the *Sancta Madre* was full. But 'twas the little wee spaniel, that he named Don Philip, that the Laugher cared most for out of the whole of his prize. He called him, at first, the Luck o' the Laird, but after he was Captain his ownself he called the whiffet the Luck o' the *Rood.*

" 'Twas the Spanish boy, you mind, Charles, who had the red kid boots that the Laugher first wore. Always, since then, he has had them special made at Port Royal and that do be the reason most men call him Redlegs, though I am thinking that was not what Broad Bart meant."

The approach of the ship to the bare wall of Cayos de Palmas had drawn away the group with the ending of the tale.

"Do you be forgetting, Peter Laffery, what Broad Bart said. I did not hear it and none other had best ever hear it again. Do you remember that, my hearty. I be thinking hisself would not care to hear it repeated, remember that."

"Aye, Charles, I do wonder that I let that slip. That sour Mortimer isn't the man to forget it. The foolish things a man will say betimes."

CHAPTER II

THE FIGHT ON THE GALLEON

THE sun was near setting as the *Azure Rood* dropped her sails below a green cliff of Cayos de Palmas. With only a spritsail flying, she edged gently into the lee of the land. So clear and blue was the water, so turquoise clear the sky, that she seemed floating in ether beside a double mountain. In the five years Redlegs had sailed this inland sea ringed about by spicy islands, he had never become accustomed to nor weary of its beauty. Now he gazed from the poop rail at a rose pink cloud that blazed with the light of the late sun. It grew larger amazingly fast and rushed toward the green island. As it neared it seemed to break into a myriad of petals as a rose that shatters in the wind. Each petal, however, trailed black legs and had a black head at the end of a long neck. With a whirring of wings the flamingos rushed over the ship and vanished beyond the green cliff.

"Spenser would have honored such beauty with a whole sonnet sequence, Jem. All I can do is long for the power of all the Elizabethans, that I might enshrine some of this glory in worthy verse."

"Eh, well, sir, each man to his trade, and none can deny you do be an honor to the Companions, sir. What orders?"

"All quiet, no lights, no noise. The fox that lurks by the runway for the fat goose would not wear bells. Post Ivemay in the foretop and Laffery on deck and bid them be strict. Then, Jem, do you come in and dine with me."

Captain Redlegs gave one last look about at the marvel of sky and sea. Then, with the small spaniel racing ahead to start the macaw screaming, he entered the cabin. A young lad in blue livery was laying a service of fine silver on the linen cloth that now covered the great table.

Half an hour later Jem and Ronald Greaves regarded each other across the well spread board. Jem was a small talker and it troubled neither him nor the Captain of the *Azure Rood* that most of the philosophic comment and literary allusions with which Hugh Greaves' son loved to besprinkle his conversation passed entirely over Jem's head. He would nod gravely and answer with some practical remark about the ship's routine.

In dress Jem confined himself to a plain black suit, well made, for he was a tidy person, but folderols were not for him. His only touch of color was a scarlet sash that tightly girt his still slim waist and served for pistols. His grizzled

black hair was cropped square across below his ears and his black beard was neatly trimmed. He was gentle of voice and deceptively mild and pleasant in manner. His broad chest and the iron muscles of his arms and thighs made him formidable in battle, where he loved to swing a heavy mace after the manner of his yeoman forebears. He was Redlegs' shadow on board, in battle, or in occasional sojourns at Tortuga or Port Royal. He had the gentle heart and the powerful fighting equipment of the English bulldog, which never snarls but efficiently polishes off his opponent and then lovingly licks his master's hand.

"Even at that—" Jem calmly continued his conversation of some hours before, as he had a way of doing, for his was a one track mind—"even though we turned freebooter, perforce, none knew ye for Sir Ronald Greaves of High Bindon since ye were at once dubbed Redlegs, and famous ha' ye made the name through the islands and on the Main."

"Aye, Jem, and home we would have gone, or at least to France, with our share of the plunder of the *Sancta Madre* if Broad Bart had not peevishly stopped the *Friend's Adventure* off Nevis because he took a fancy to her. Then, angered because he found her astink with African negroes, he must set what were left alive at liberty on

Aquila, putting the crew adrift in their own boats after burning the ship because she had made a stench."

Jem laughed at the memory of this.

"That," continued the Captain, "was enough, but, of course, he must have Tiger Baldwin up into his cabin, where I was working at maps, to have me preach him a sermon on the beauty and dignity of pirating as compared with slave stealing. Tiger Baldwin never could forget a face he hated. 'Ha!' says he. ' 'Tis the little Laird—fugitive, traitor and redleg, turned gentleman of the sea. 'Twill be good telling in Carlisle.'

" 'Shall I pistol him, Redlegs?' asked Bart, 'or do you care to sully your Spanish blade on him?' One must admit Bart was aye willing for action."

"And then, sir, ye made the one mistake of your life, I am thinking, and ye did it for why ye knew Broad Bart hated to kill a man in cold blood." Jem had been carried out of his usual silence by the memory of that mischance of Baldwin's ship.

"I had some scruples myself about using chance power to rid myself of an enemy. Some day I shall kill Baldwin for that he brutally beat a boy and also for that he is the cause of my expatriation. But—it will not be when he is a helpless prisoner," Redlegs said.

"Broad Bart made a fine sailor o' ye, sir, and

ye have done much credit to his training." Jem could think of little outside his ship.

"Broad Bart was a wonderful man, even if he did die a pirate, Jem. If he had lived in the days of Queen Bess he had been knighted for his fighting and given a whole navy to do it with. The way he handled the pirate fleet at Porto Bello was worthy old Sir Francis himself. Do you mind how he handled the French Captain that complained that he was in the post of greatest danger? Sent him back to the rear to pick up the plunder from the disabled galleons and put the *Bloody Jane* at two Spaniards at the one time. He fired broadsides into both at once by running between them, and they demasted each other when their foolish returning of his cannonade went over his little ship. Then, when the Frenchman, having loaded up with plate, tried to run away in the dark, Bart rounded him up and made him disgorge, using language that for sheer pointed cutting was worse than our Mortimer's feather-edged knives."

"Mortimer," Jem was at once off on a pet grievance, "is a man I like little. He is always finding a fault here and there with whatever comes to his eyes. He makes others discontented."

"You are spoiled by the good humor of your old sea dogs. I've watched that lean Mortimer

myself and have decided that he is like a mustard poultice, a valuable counter-irritant. If they get their ire up at him for his complaints about how things are run, they'll have a vent for their steam like a kettle spout which keeps the lid from dancing off. I've seen no real harm in the lean fellow."

"Nevertheless I shall have my eye on him." Jem's voice was as pleasantly husky as usual, but Greaves knew that if Jem found Mortimer in any mischief there would be short shrift for the malcontent. Redlegs grinned boyishly at his big mate.

"Keep the fellow busy, Jem. That's been your motto for these three years. By the shades of Socrates, thou art an old schoolmaster. Set that Mortimer to teaching some of your quick-handed bullies his skill at knife throwing. Set him up a bullseye on the forecastle and watch him purr over his school. Lord love us, how we love to show off the thing we can do best. Try it."

Neither Jem nor Captain Redlegs had any intention of sleeping so long as there was the possibility of the treasure galleon appearing in sight at some hour of the night.

It was a moonless night. The *Azure Rood,* in the lee of the little island, was invisible and silent. Redlegs, leaning over the rail of the stern gallery, watched the constellations come wheeling up the sky until the beauty of the night caught at his

throat. Lovely fairy fish slithered through the ripples, scattering drops of phosphorescence.

Don Philip whined on the Captain's arm. Redlegs turned toward the cabin but paused to watch a brilliant fiery star that was rising in the west. The east was whitening to the false dawn as the Captain came out on the poop. Ivemay came dropping down from the foretop, where he had been on watch all the short night.

" 'Tis the galleon comin' on, sir. Devil a doubt about it. Yon she grows on the nor'west, sir."

The constellation Redlegs had watched was distinctly nearer and brighter. It was a lighted ship on the sea, not a star in the sky.

"Aye! 'Tis the Spaniard, without a doubt. Only a great galleon would show such a glow. Let her pass, then follow on her heels and lay up to her just at daybreak, Jem. Use the lightest sails and slip on her track like a cat on a mouse."

There was then on board the *Azure Rood* a tensity of silent preparation for battle. The sea was so still that the sound of a shout would carry to the great galleon, whose poop lanterns glowed like strange flowers in the blue night. Wholly unconscious of danger, she moved with calm progress. The hidden ship, lying in wait, slipped her anchor and glided on the trail as silently as a jungle cat slips through the grasses. If there was a watch at

the top of the Spanish ship's mainmast, he slept his last sleep in that quiet hour. No alarm rang across the decks of the galleon until the east glowed like an opening flower and the gilding of the galleon's prow and castled poop gleamed like the gold plate she carried in her hold. Rainbow tinted, her great sails bellied to the morning trades and her golden banner flung back the first beams of the sun.

The *Azure Rood* had crept up on her quarter close enough for Ivemay, master gunner, to be sure of landing a shot from the bow gun in her rudder. Then the wild clarion of a trumpet rang across the decks of the ship, whose poop carried a life-sized portrait of King Philip. The men on the *Azure Rood* burst into sound like a pack of hounds at the sight of the stag at bay.

" 'Tis the *Rey Philippe,* carrying the Manila cargo," Redlegs had already muttered softly to Jem. Now his voice rang out, rivaling the blare of the Spaniard's trumpets.

"Up! Up! Dependence Ellery, up with your musickers! Answer the trumpets with a good Christian hymn ere we show our teeth." Then, "Down sails!" he ordered, and turning to his master gunner, said: "Ivemay, first the rudder, then the mizzen!"

In every born leader of men, God seems to have

breathed a secret thing. There was a quality in that ringing voice which explained Redlegs' success. Power over men is a gift. Redlegs had earned that gift in a hard school.

The men who had silently climbed the shrouds in the twilight, dropped the sails with a clatter and then slid to the decks to prepare for boarding. Dependence Ellery's orchestra had been waiting the signal. Now, led by Ellery's trumpet, they swept into the hymn, 'The King and Fortune,' the voices almost drowning the roll of the drums and the high call of the fiddle.

As the hymn ended, Ivemay fired his cannon and the deck leaped to its roar. Almost in the same breath, from the poop of the *Rey Philippe* came a ball that, skithering through the bulwark of the main deck, perforated Laffery's big drum before it rolled through a port into the sea. Laffery finished his last words, "God save the right," then flung his drumsticks aside with a string of furious oaths from which one might gather that since the Spanish had no decent courtesy to show to Englishmen when they were at their religious services, it would be necessary to teach them some such consideration for the proprieties, at the sword's point.

Ivemay's bow gun had smashed the rudder of the galleon and her attempt to turn enough to

give a full broadside was frustrated as she fell away helplessly. The *Azure Rood,* with her canvas slatting in the wind, came about at Redlegs' sharp word when he heard the commander of the *Rey Philippe,* now standing on her poop giving his orders, shout for the broadside. The *Rood* presented only a glancing target for the fire of the two rows of guns which the galleon carried. In spite of the clever turning, it seemed that the light vessel must be blown from the water by the storm of those thirty great cannons roaring across the scant space between the two ships. It was the sails only that received that blasting rain of balls, and fortunately no mast was shattered. The high walls of the galleon, as compared with the slim proportions of the *Azure Rood,* made the latter an almost impossible target for the Spanish gunners. The quick little ship wheeled and came alongside the galleon on the side from which the charge had just been made and, almost touching the great hulk, delivered her full broadside. The balls tore through the gun decks of the big ship, rendering her guns harmless for the remainder of the fight.

Only a commander very sure of his men would have attempted to force hand-to-hand fighting so early in the battle.

"Away, boarders!"

When the ringing call from the young captain

echoed across the decks it was answered by a hoarse volley of cheers that made Redlegs laugh aloud as he said to Jem: "Your bulldogs are yelping to come to grips."

On the Spaniard the commander still stood on the poop, issuing orders to the men who were now swarming up from the gun decks. Confusion reigned there, not the seeming confusion of tense and rapid preparation such as prevailed on board the *Azure Rood.* There, every man knew his place and work and sprang into the shrouds with musket or lined up to spring aboard the galleon as soon as the hooks fastened the two ships together.

Redlegs had left the poop and was standing on the deck, ready to lead the boarders. He wore a light coat of mail beautifully chased in silver. From the steel cap on his head flaunted his scarlet plume, and his red-booted legs were braced against the shock of the ships, now within a few feet of each other. Besides his sword he was armed only with two pistols which hung from a scarlet band about his neck. He flung up his head to shout an order to the men in the shrouds who were to cover the boarders with musket fire. There was the look of a poised eagle about him. His thin face and eager eyes were fierce now, with the prey within striking distance.

"Fire! Away, boarders! Aho! for High Bindon!"

Sides ground together, clash of hooks clinging like claws, a shower of musket balls going ahead of the men, and a ball from Ivemay's bow gun crashing a path across the galleon's crowded deck; and above all the uproar rang Redlegs' clarion voice, with something in it that lifted men's hearts and made them outdo their best endeavors. They echoed his shout "Aho! High Bindon!" making a war song of words that to them had meaning only because Redlegs shouted them. The flash of his red boots as he sprang up and over the high rail of the Spaniard was a battle flag that they must follow to death, if need be.

It looked like suicide for that bare fifty to board the galleon, where more than twice that number of men-at-arms awaited their coming. But Redlegs, or any self-respecting buccaneer of his period, considered three to one only an equality; they met without a question much greater odds.

The commander of the galleon continued to shout his orders from his poop. It is one thing to tell hired soldiers to go fight the enemy; it is another to tell men fighting for glory and gain to come and take them. The force of the onslaught depends more upon the velocity of the missile than upon its bulk. When the boarding party struck the body of men drawn up on the deck of the King of Spain's ship they drove straight through as an

axe splits a block. Through and back, the pirates raged, singing, shouting. Then the deck was a chaos of mad, hand-to-hand fighting.

Soon Captain Redlegs found himself facing a gold-braided man who led a reserve force from the stern. He was evidently a chief officer. With a laugh Redlegs squared about and thrust at him with the silver-hilted Toledo blade, his first spoils of war. The officer met the onslaught stoutly and the sword play was keen. The officer scowled fiercely at this pirate chief who fenced with flashing eyes and teeth and punctuated his thrusts with now a whimsical boast, now a line from the classics, and seemed as detached from the general strife about them as if they were playing at tilts with buttoned foils in a master's atelier.

"Thy gold plume must abase its pride, Señor." The silver-hilted sword flipped the feather on the Spanish leader's hat beneath the feet of two blackamoors who were facing Mortimer's cutlass six feet away.

So lost was the young captain in his game that had not the Spanish officer permitted a look of relief to brighten his face as his eyes shifted to something directly behind Redlegs' head, that young chieftain had fought his last fight. Without a backward glance the youth flung himself forward and down beneath the Spaniard's forward

drive, his own sword thrusting upward beneath the officer's ribs. The youth caught himself on one hand for a forward leap. A giant of a man, an Iberian mountaineer, had rushed with clubbed musket to his officer's assistance, and now his fearful blow, meeting empty air as it whistled past Redlegs' ducking head, overbalanced the fellow so that he fell to his knees before his leader, who had dropped his sword and stood with both hands clutching at his chest, transthrust by Redlegs' sword.

Jem, wielding a double-headed axe, a terrific implement in his long arms, had cut a swath through a crowd of men armed with cutlasses. He was never too occupied in any fight to keep a watchful eye on the little Laird, as he still called Captain Redlegs. When the Iberian had clubbed his emptied musket and rushed at Redlegs, Jem had sprung forward from his own fight. Redlegs had no sooner received the spent blow on his boot-heel than the axe sheared through the giant's spine, decapitating him at the chief officer's feet just as that fighter fell dead from Redlegs' last thrust.

"Aho! for High Bindon!"

"Tulleribulo and yohoo, yohoo!"

The cry and the answering chorus rang again and again about the decks where the men from

the *Azure Rood* were slashing their way among the Spanish hirelings.

Captain Redlegs had sprung to his feet even as he made that fatal thrust that left the men-at-arms leaderless. Now he was up the poop ladder, driving straight toward the commander himself, who had not moved from his place, though he had ceased from futile ordering and was watching with a despairing scowl the retreat of the men-at-arms before the shouting pirates.

Scarface Pete, who but yesterday had peacefully daubed gilt paint on the stern rail of the *Azure Rood* while he bawled a love ditty, was now ploughing through the Spanish fighters, cutting a passage with a six foot bar of iron which he whirled as if it were an oak quarterstaff. The heads it cracked were past all healing, and neither sword nor dagger nor clubbed musket could come within reach of him. All the while he bawled his wild, "Tulleribulo, yohoo! Yohoo!"

The wild, triumphant chanting was a powerful aid in the demoralization of the now fleeing crew of the galleon.

There was deep despair on the face of the commander as he faced the challenge of Redlegs.

"Strike your flag, sir! Surrender yourselves prisoners ere yon men are all forced into the maws of the sharks."

This was no idle boast, for even as Redlegs spoke men were jumping overboard at the point of the buccaneers' cutlasses. It was the habit of the pirates to make a complete sweep, and back and forth they would fight, without giving quarter, until the decks were cleaned or covered with dead.

"Don Mateo Perano cannot yield alive to dogs of pirates. See his wife and son at the mercy of beasts? Rather, welcome death!"

He drew his sword and faced Redlegs, who hesitated to attack this slim old man whose hair shone white beneath his steel cap. The decision was taken from Redlegs. Either by chance, or deliberate aim, a musket ball struck the Don in the middle of the forehead. Dropping his sword with a clatter, he turned slowly till he faced the new risen sun, then fell forward on his face on his lost quarter-deck.

Redlegs doffed his hat and stood for a moment over the fallen commander. Then, turning to survey the fighting on the deck below, he saw that the fight had turned into a slaughter. The Spaniards had flung down their arms and were pleading for mercy from the fighters, who were coolly cutting them down as they knelt.

The voice that rang across the bloody deck held no note of raillery nor uplift. It held the hiss and

menace of a whip which cracks and lashes and cracks again.

"Cease fighting! Mortimer, another thrust will be thy last! Scarface, drop thy bludgeon! By the Rood, Ivemay shall turn his bow gun at you if you wake not to reason!"

He had lifted the pistols in either hand and now a shot plowed the deck just in front of Mortimer, whose sharp knife had slit the throat of a black-amoor who was begging for mercy.

This seemed to strike sense into the hot-headed fighters, for each man on that deck knew that the ball that missed Mortimer's feet by an inch had not missed his heart by as much unless Redlegs had willed that it should. Then Scarface lifted his bull voice again and all the fighters from the *Rood* joined in the shout of victory. Even those who sat weakly against a mast or bulwark, nursing disabling wounds, found strength to cry:

"Tulleribulo! Yohoo! Yohoo!
Aho! for High Bindon! Yohoo!"

CHAPTER III

THE CABIN OF THE "REY PHILIPPE"

CAPTAIN REDLEGS, resplendent in scarlet plumed beaver and silver trimmed blue silk, was holding court in the great cabin of the *Rey Philippe*. It was some hours after the death of Don Mateo Perano. The two ships were still grappled together but the decks had been cleared of dead and the prisoners had been locked in the forward cabin of the galleon. Bathed, his flowing locks curled and perfumed, Captain Redlegs had entered the galleon's cabin with a committee selected by the pirate crew to interrogate the cabin prisoners, to discover the value of the cargo and, perhaps, to estimate the ransoms to be required of the important personages the cabins had yielded.

Besides Don Florez Perano, the young son of Don Mateo Perano, there was a tall, stern-faced priest who, in answer to Redlegs' polite interrogation, declared himself to be archbishop of the church in Cartagena. With him were two other priests, all on a mission to Rome. They had with Captain Redlegs' permission held a funeral service for Don Mateo. When Redlegs had entered

the cabin after the fight he had been faced by a woman of great beauty. Young she was and she looked at him with an air of confident pride. At the first sight of her slim erectness and proud dark eyes, Redlegs had doffed his plumed steel cap and bowed very low, for he thought of his mother, Lady Joan Greaves, as she had stood before the great mantel at High Bindon and bade her oldest son to ride and fight for the king. Only once since that day so long ago had Ronald Greaves looked into the face of proud, high-bred beauty. Perhaps the Doña Rosita Perano was the reason he had deferred his hearing of the prisoners for two hours, that he might attire himself like a gentleman.

Before him now Don Florez was answering questions as to treasure.

"Gold bars from Manila, estimated, you believe, at the value of a hundred thousand pieces of eight. Silver bullion from Lima valued at fifty thousand."

Laffery, who was one of the committee, turned to call in a hoarse whisper to Scarface, who stood leering at the cabin door:

"She be a fine fat goose dripping golden eggs. 'Twill mean Port Royal and a dozen yellow gals for ye."

Doña Rosita shuddered as Scarface thrust into the door to hear more news. Meeting the cold

glance of Redlegs' eyes, Scarface melted away into invisibility like a small bad boy caught at a jam pot.

"Besides the China silk and the spiced marmalades and preserved fruits and wine, which, being in bulk, we can easily estimate, do you perhaps carry jewels and suchlike valuable treasure which may perhaps be secreted and difficult for us to find in a hurried search?"

Young Don Florez Perano was not a man of steel. He denied at first any knowledge of the ship, but when pressed he wavered and contradicted himself until Mortimer, one of the committee, muttered a suggestion for more direct questioning.

"Are you suggesting that I use torture?"

Redlegs' question had been put in a tone so mild and apparently desirous of advice that the lean malcontent stepped forward and opened his mouth to give his view of the present unprofessional mildness. Dependence Ellery's boot heel came down on his toe with Ellery's two hundred pounds of weight above it. Under cover of Mortimer's howl of pain, Ellery growled into his ear:

"Man, when the youngling speaks soft and pretty-like, you run, fool, run! He'll flay ye in just about another minute." At the same moment Laffery elbowed Mortimer out through the cabin

door, answering for him in a suave tone.

"He begs to be excused, sir, from any suggestings. He's disconvenienced for the present, sir."

With entire gravity Captain Redlegs continued his inquisition.

The young Spaniard had fixed his eyes upon Father Sebastian, the archbishop, and Redlegs' question was repeated with an edge in its tone.

"Have you jewels secreted, Don Perano?"

"None. I have told all I know of the ship's treasure." The youth's eyes were still held by the priest, who now spoke smoothly.

"What, might I be permitted to ask, are you intending to do with the *Rey Philippe*?" he asked.

"You may, indeed, ask," answered Redlegs, shortly. He had little patience with the Spanish priesthood, for the tales told of the inquisitions in the Spanish colonies had been dark ones. "I've in truth too few men to handle a second ship, so after stripping her, I shall sink her."

"And the prisoners—?" The Father's voice was mild.

"I'm no butcher, as you may know. My name has run far through the seas. None can accuse Redlegs of torture or cruelty to prisoners. That is more than any Spanish priest or captain can boast. I may hold you for ransom. The men-at-arms I shall put ashore on Cayos de Palmas."

A gleam came into the Spanish priest's eyes. They narrowed as he looked hard at young Don Florez Perano.

"I know, perhaps, more of Don Mateo's plans than even his son was informed of. I know, for instance, that the jewels you seem to suspect as a part of the *Rey Philippe's* cargo were to be taken aboard at—" Both Florez and Doña Rosita gave a slight start, but Father Sebastian had stepped toward Redlegs as if to keep his attention riveted upon himself. "At La Margarita. There awaits us a wonderful shipment of selected pearls for his Majesty, the King of Spain. If, Captain Redlegs, you should choose to run your well-armed and well-manned vessel into that harbor, this pearl treasure, equal in value to all the gold and silver on board, could be secured at little risk. The fort is poorly manned and could easily be reduced by your effective marksmanship. I am offering this pearl treasure as a ransom for myself and these of the cabin." Father Sebastian finished his speech with great meekness and stood with eyes cast down.

"Your offer is good, Father. I think I am tempted by the pearls beyond any shadow of resistance. They appeal to the imagination. Gleaming spheres of soft fire! What a rope of them would mean to dark beauty!" The youthful captain had spoken

with quick enthusiasm, as if carried away by the thought of the gems. The flash of his keen eyes had leaped, however, from Florez, whose eyes held a gleam—was it hope or hate?—to Doña Rosita, whose face was a conflict of emotions; surely fear was the dominant one.

Captain Redlegs rose to declare the audience finished.

"Dependence Ellery, report to the crew that the treasure we have gained will enrich all. As for going to La Margarita, I shall take counsel with them, of course."

The men had withdrawn, and the cabin prisoners were ordered into a rear cabin under guard of Jem and three assistants. Doña Rosita lingered as the priests and young Perano withdrew. Captain Redlegs seemed not averse to the lady's evident desire for a word with him. He gave Jem an order that would occupy him for some time. Then, with his scarlet plume sweeping the shining floor, Redlegs gave the lovely prisoner the smile which none had seen on his handsome face in many years. It was a tribute to beauty and honor and should have melted a cold heart. It was quite plain that Señora Perano was not unaware of its homage. She came close and spoke softly.

"You must not go near La Margarita!"

Redlegs smiled again. "Not for the shimmering milky pearls, loveliest spoils of this turquoise sea, white as the moonlight on the breakers beneath the palms? I could not forego those pearls, Señora."

"You must not venture. The *Rey Philippe* was to meet her convoy there—two great ships and three galleys. 'Tis a trap of steel that will close on you. You must not go there."

"Ah!"

Captain Redlegs stepped back, still uncovered but grave now, his strange eyes searching Doña Rosita's beautiful face with a keenness like the play of a rapier's flashing.

"Why do you tell me this, Señora? Why are you warning me of this trap, neatly laid and baited by the archbishop of Cartagena?" The tone was very gentle and soft. It seemed to the lady to be a request to full confidence. She dropped her eyes and flushed.

"There is something about you, something so gallant, so full of *bonhomie*—no real woman could see you run into such danger." She lifted her eyes with a sudden glory of a smile. Few men in her world could have resisted the invitation of that gesture. Captain Redlegs was a youth whose standard of woman's beauty had been set for all time by Joan Greaves. He saw her now as he

had seen her last standing in her hall, her face torn by the anguish of giving up her only son rather than betray the sanctuary of the churchman, who had trusted himself to her keeping.

"And your son? And your Father confessor? What do you expect for them after this attempt to trap me?" The tone was still soft, but the piercing eyes were hard to face—or would have been had Doña Rosita not been carried away by her own emotion, and so made blind to that look in the young pirate's face, a look that would have sent any hardened buccaneer in his crew away from its veiled menace.

"That stupid Florez is no son of mine. The priest is a—" The lady stopped short in her speech, which held a tone of scorn and bitterness. She had seen the narrowing eyes of the pirate captain and above all other things Doña Rosita could sense the feeling of a man. She swayed toward him, her face transfigured by a smile, her voice softening to beauty.

"Oh, Señor! I see in you such wealth of understanding, such feeling. You are one who will sympathize when I tell you that it would be torture for me to return to La Margarita. I spent my girlhood there and I hate it. But, Señor, in Cartagena lie the beautiful estates of Don Perano —mine now. There, where I would have wealth

and power, where we could be free—oh, Señor, will you not take me back there? I could make you wealthy beyond your hopes in this life of pirating." She was very close now. Her voice, hurried, full of tensity of feeling, was meant to sweep the young man into an emotional state where he would promise blindly what she wished. "There is a treasure, the Manila jewels, rubies, emeralds richer far than the poor pearls of Margarita. I, alone, know where they are hidden; we, alone, shall share them if the Señor Capitan will come to Cartagena."

"And your husband?" Redlegs' voice was low, but cold and crisp, like mountain water running over stones. His eyes were the gold grey of northern seas. "What of Don Mateo, Señora, hardly an hour in his watery grave?"

"Oh, Señor! You know nothing of that old man. He was dragging me back to Margarita, where I would have suffered. Oh, I cannot tell you what it would mean to me to go to that hateful place. If you but listen to my plea, you will never regret the Isle of Pearls, Señor. Leave these priests and the boy on a desert cayo. Let them die, if you wish. I hate them all! But you and I are young; we can be happy."

There was something in the Señora's frantic pleading that Redlegs could not at once fathom.

He realized that she was trying to hide behind this flurry of words and rush him into the acquiescence that a thoughtless man might yield to a beautiful woman. He stepped back, but concealed his distrust of her.

"I have no desire, Señora Perano, to run into a trap set by the churchman and your stepson. Still, I must respect the bravery of their willingness to risk their lives for the sake of destroying an enemy. Neither could have expected to escape the destruction of the *Azure Rood.* I thank you for your warning and will revise my plans. If possible, I shall reward you suitably." Bowing the lady to a seat with the air of a courtier, the Captain called to his mate. "Jem, bring the bishop and young Perano back for further questioning."

In a moment the tall priest re-entered the cabin, his stern eyes at once seeking the face of Doña Rosita, now seated at the ebony table, a light of satisfaction in her eyes which did not fall before the priest's accusing glance. Don Florez did not look at her. Redlegs, watching keenly now, became aware of an ingrown hatred in the youth for this beautiful woman.

"I have changed my plans concerning this ship, Jem. We will man the *Azure Rood* with the English prisoners you found in the hold of the *Rey Philippe* and ten of our own men. The *Rood* shall

proceed to Cayos de Palmas and there leave the Spanish prisoners, all but these of the cabin. I, with the bulk of our crew, will proceed directly to La Margarita." The Captain turned suddenly to the young Spaniard.

"Don Perano, what will happen if the *Rey Philippe* sails into the harbor at sunset? Will she be boarded at once by officers from the port?"

The young man hesitated. "No—that is, not unless she signals for a boat. The governor will expect a boat carrying the commander to come to the town." There was uncertainty in the boy's voice. He was not able to see the face of Father Sebastian.

"If I hold Doña Rosita as a hostage and send you ashore with a message from Don Mateo Perano, asking that the pearl treasure of the king be delivered, surely you will be careful not to betray the condition aboard?" Redlegs was speaking smoothly and quietly. Don Florez was stung for the first time into an expression of deep and sincere feeling. He wheeled on the Señora Rosita, his eyes aflame. "That woman! Gladly would I die to see her in the lowest—"

"My son!" The priest's deep voice cut into Don Florez' fury. "Leave this evil woman. God's eye is upon her. In his good time her punishment is sure."

The eyes of Doña Rosita smiled, evilly, it seemed to the Captain. She seemed to feel that she had triumphed over the two, who, it was quite apparent, returned her hatred. There was some coil here that would be worth unwinding, perhaps.

"Eh, well, Señors, Scarface can be very clever with the use of the instruments that are well known to the churchman. A string is a little thing, Father, but a small bit of twisting it about a boy's forehead, you know yourself, will make one, who is no more resolute that I perceive the young Don Florez to be, give any information one wishes. Torture may be ugly, but it is an efficient method, which I shall use on necessity. So." The young commander became brisk and businesslike. The prisoners were sent away without ceremony. Jem was told to call a meeting of the company that all might help to decide matters of great importance.

CHAPTER IV

DOÑA ROSITA

NONE of the crew of the *Azure Rood* had been killed in the fighting aboard the galleon. Many were nursing serious wounds but even these unfortunate ones were cheerful, for the treasure was great. When Captain Redlegs told them of the chance to increase that wealth by a raid upon La Margarita, their answer was instant and enthusiastic. Mortimer ran true to form by demanding how Redlegs expected to take a port guarded by a fort and two great galleons, to say nothing of the two galleys, which in a harbor were more dangerous than the galleons.

"And would himself be suggesting the raid if the way hadn't already been apparent to him? Why for should we be told until we need? All we want is to follow Redlegs," Ivemay scornfully answered the lean one's question.

"No, Ivemay, the question is a fair one, and the plan is so simple there is no reason for concealment. It may fail, but I believe it will work. It all hinges on the use of the *Rey Philippe,* which, as you can all see, will be able to enter the har-

bor without the slightest danger, for she is expected at any hour. I shall plan to anchor just after sunset, and the *Azure Rood,* with Jem and the crew, must come in at dawn. Then the two galleons that are awaiting the *Rey Philippe* can be taken and their guns turned on the town and the fort. Surprise, as we know, always finds the Spanish unready and easily thrown into a panic. The risks are great, and if any of you wish you may remain outside on the *Azure Rood.*"

Even Mortimer, having voiced his chronic discontent, said he was willing to take any risks that another could encounter. Jem remonstrated strongly at thought of separating from Redlegs.

"I could give control of the *Azure Rood* to no one else, Jem. I shall depend on her arriving at sunrise; her failure would mean the loss of the entire enterprise. There is no one so sure as you, Jem, no one on whom I would dare depend with certainty." That settled the matter as far as Jem was concerned, but he made no attempt to hide his grief and for the first time in any man's knowledge was gruff and sullen in his manner.

"Don't forget, Jem, you will find the Luck of the *Rood* between the pillows on my bed. The wee lad does have a fearful hate for the noise of battle. Cherish him, Jem!" These were the Captain's last words to his lieutenant.

The prisoners in the hold of the *Rey Philippe* were English buccan makers taken on the mainland near Cartagena. As heretics they were being taken to Madrid, by Father Sebastian's request, for questioning by the church. Their hatred for the black monk was so great that had they been at liberty on the galleon the priests would have needed a number of guards to preserve them for ransom. These Englishmen now begged hard for the privilege of striking some kind of blow at the Spanish; to a man they were ready to join the pirates in their raid on the Isle of Pearls, La Margarita. So Jem, in the *Azure Rood,* with the men-at-arms from the galleon as prisoners, and the English prisoners as a crew, drew away from the *Rey Philippe* and returned toward Cayos de Palmas, there to await nightfall before starting for La Margarita. Keeping as pilot an English prisoner who knew the harbor on the pearl island, Captain Redlegs, with a hastily patched rudder, set the shimmering sails of South Sea Island fiber that made the *Rey Philippe* a sight of marvelous beauty on the blue Caribbean and drew away toward La Margarita as fast as the steady trades could blow him. It was necessary for his plan that the *Rey Philippe* enter the harbor in time to be distinctly recognized, yet at the exact time when the sudden tropical darkness should shroud

her decks before she could be fully anchored.

The *Azure Rood* had sunk below the horizon and the sun was yellowing toward the west, with La Margarita a purple blur rising in the south, when Redlegs, coming into the cabin, was told by Ivemay that the Doña Rosita desired to talk to him on most important business.

"She do be nigh distracted, sir, and I ha' put Scarface Chessman wi' a cutlass before the woman's door. But I doubt he will be able to keep her in bounds long. She be powerful strong set on her own way, sir."

"Aye, that is rather an understatement of Señora Perano's mind, I have no doubt. Well, I have no desire to attempt the lady's regeneration, but she must be taught some things. I have ceased to sympathize with Don Mateo's untimely taking off. It was, possibly, not so great a misfortune as it seemed."

"Aye, sir," agreed Ivemay gravely, "as Dependence Ellery do always be telling us, 'God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform.' Shall I bring the lady at once, sir?"

"Yes, bring her in and let Chessman stand in the doorway. His face should be a very good object lesson if she is hard to convince that she must listen to reason."

Doña Rosita, however, came into the presence

of her captor with an air of great meekness and sorrow that entirely belied Ivemay's account of her condition. She was dressed in a robe of dull yellow silk of great beauty, which effectively set off her mature charm.

The effect upon the pirate chief would, however, have failed to please the Spanish lady had she been able to look into his mind. Her dark loveliness brought to Captain Redlegs' mind the picture of a slim quadroon girl in a single, sun-colored garment, who had moved about the white acres of Beholden during a short life filled with service and love to everyone. The comparison was all in favor of the tragic slave girl of Barbados.

The Señora had come close to Redlegs, ignoring the cold courtesy of his manner.

"Please send that dreadful man away. I cannot think with him leering at me. I wish to have a private understanding with you, Señor Capitan."

"Chessman understands no Spanish, Señora, and I consider his presence necessary. You may speak as freely as you desire."

A baffled look came over the face of the beautiful woman. Still, she felt very certain of her power.

"You have not turned toward Cartagena as I implored you to do. Surely you will not risk your life in such an impossible thing as an attempt to

take fortified La Margarita. Her miserable pale gems are not worth the risk of your life, Señor, you so young, so handsome."

"What is it you fear so in La Margarita, Señora Perano? If you will but be frank, it may be I can help you. How can I believe the thing you seem to be saying to me—that you have a desire for me?"

Again the lady's mobile face was swept with a conflict of emotions. She hesitated, the youth thought, on the verge of confession. She seemed puzzled by his contained coldness. Then at last she decided on her best weapon—her beauty and attractiveness.

"Oh, Señor, surely you can see that no woman like me could fail to admire a man like yourself, so gallant, so brave, so handsome. We women of the tropics love at once, Señor Capitan, and we are not ashamed to declare it. I do promise you wealth and power, if you will but come home with me, Señor. You cannot win in this wild attempt."

There was an earnestness in the lady's voice that might have convinced a more vain man of her sincerity. But Ronald Greaves was not vain, and he was of all things sincere and felt at once the lack of that quality in another. He ignored the Señora's personal appeal and answered her last words.

"Have you ever watched men play bowls, Señora? Then you must know that a very small ball may knock down ten pegs if accurately thrown. 'Tis the odds that make the game. Yonder, rising on the sky, is La Margarita. In three hours, just as the sun is dropping, the pilots of La Margarita will sight Don Mateo's galleon without the harbor gate. It will be full dark when we anchor. The galleon, though it will answer the salute from the fort, will not put a boat ashore until morning. There is no power that you can invoke that can change that plan."

There was something in his coldness that pierced the egotism of the lady. She had succumbed, after the manner of those of her emotional nature, to the charm and power so evident in the pirate. Even his coldness had piqued her vanity.

"I warn you, Señor Le Pirate, that no one can repulse Rosita without suffering her vengeance. She loves, she hates, she punishes!"

Her anger was so great that Redlegs almost expected her to fly at him. Scarface came stalking into the cabin from his place at the door. She swept past him toward the cabin. Chessman blinked, then gave an understanding leer at his Captain, who, however, chose to ignore the look.

"If you leave that lady's door unguarded for a moment, Chessman, or allow yourself to be ca-

joled by her, or her maid, I'll renounce my principles and hang you up by the thumbs with slow matches between your fingers. She's as dangerous as a poison adder."

Scarface ducked his head.

"Now rest easy, sir. Chessman will do the chore for ye, sir," and he hurried after the irate lady.

CHAPTER V

THE ISLE OF PEARLS

THE sun was a red ball in the west and the flamingos, like blown roses, were streaming from their fishing to their nests in the hills of the island. A gilded galleon, under a bellying mass of rainbow tinted sails, stood in toward the harbor gate of La Margarita. The golden banner of the King of Spain received a salute from the fort and from the convoys that were waiting at anchor in the blue harbor within the sheltering reef where the boats of the pearl fishers lingered. Dropping all but the lightest of her sails the galleon came slowly to her place between her sister ships, all three lying broadside toward the fort that guarded the city whose white walls and softly tinted roofs of rose and yellow rising from the shore to the wooded hillsides around the bay gleamed like the soft lights of mother of pearl in a hollow shell where the most fairy-like of gems is cradled.

Before the *Rey Philippe* had berthed in the harbor the sun had sunk and the raven wing of night had swooped upon the lovely island harbor,

blotting out all movement. Boats had been pulling from the galleons and galleys toward the town and calls and songs now reëchoed about the *Rey Philippe* as she went about her business of anchoring. It was evident that the little lonely town of the pearl fisheries was holding festival for the armada gathered at her gates. As the darkness dropped, a blaze of lights and music along the water-front proclaimed the spirit of carnival.

" 'Tis well for us that the town is full of sailors. I'll wager that not an officer is aboard any vessel at anchor here nor is there more than a bare watch left of the crews."

Ivemay and Captain Redlegs were standing on the poop. When the great galleon had entered the harbor there had been gathered on her quarter-deck (plain to be seen with the glasses from the shore) her commander and the reverend churchmen—the famous Father Sebastian himself, one of them—who were expected to be guests of the church in La Margarita.

"Mortimer can speak Spanish well enough in a pinch. We'd best send him with the note from Don Mateo to the governor, explaining that neither himself nor the archbishop wishes to make a landing until morning. Florez wrote me a very pretty missive and Father Sebastian added a note to his brother priest here."

"I like not this sending into the very midst of the Spanish stronghold even a brace of our slim fighting force. Counting the soldiers of the fort, and all the crews of these big ships, there must be five hundred trained fighters to our scant sixty, some of whom are little able to bear a musket."

"Tut, tut, Charles! Ten to one are only sporting odd for the brethern. I take it that we shall have little need to carry muskets. If we cannot crack this nut with our brains we are undone."

"Ah, well! If it is to be done with brains, sir, then it is indeed your ownself's problem, and we need worry our heads little about it. If it were the big guns now—"

"That it will be, Charles, brains and big guns. But first we must be let alone, without suspicion, for the night. So do you send Mortimer here for a messenger. He must be dressed in gold and silver lace, as becomes an officer. That will please the man. He longs for place and power. Ha! If it were not for my fair curls I'd do the trick myself. Nay, why not?"

"Nay, now, Captain, that is not a sample, I am hoping, of the brains you are going to apply to the capture of this fleet and fort and city. Yourself can't be risked."

Captain Redlegs flung back his head with a gay laugh.

"Old Jem's safe away. Why not have a bit of an adventure out of it myself? Boast I not that I never say 'go' but always 'come'? Mortimer and I shall be the officers of Don Mateo, who, God be merciful, is very ill and remains aboard with his religious comforter. I'll leave you in charge, Ivemay. Do be discreet—don't trust that Señora for one moment. If any from the other ships come to the *Rey Philippe,* Peter's lame Spanish must manage. Say illness aboard forbids visitors."

So it was that an hour or so after sunset, when the cantinas along the water-front were at the height of their celebration, a boat put ashore from the *Rey Philippe.*

The officer in charge was a handsome, fair man, whose high-bred face held a look of arrogant hauteur. He was attired in a suit of dove-colored silk, heavy with silver lace. His silver-mounted sword dangled at his heels. The only spot of color in his costume was a plume the color of a flamingo's breast that wreathed his wide hat. Beneath this his hair was tied under a great bow of silver ribbon.

His aide was a dark-faced, black-haired man, gorgeous in scarlet coat and black hat. His glances of suspicion, right and left, and his tendency to finger the dagger which hung in a gold-mounted sheath at his belt, might easily pass for signs of

high-strung temper, not unusual in the military Spanish.

The two left their boat, which immediately withdrew from the dock, and passed up the street that led from the quay to the governor's mansion, conspicuous in the open plaza directly facing the bay. The two grandees were respectfully saluted by the sailors and soldiers from the fort, who filled the wide street. The plaza was ablaze with torches. Laughter and gaiety prevailed among the many gathered there. Music from the stone cathedral on the plaza contended with the dance music from the cantinas, where the fandango was in full swing. Soft music from guitars in hidden courtyards drifted out into the plaza and the merry laughter of women trilled from the latticed balconies of the houses.

The governor's palace was ablaze with lights and the words, "*Rey Philippe,*" were passport for the two messengers of Don Mateo.

The governor, Don Vasquiz, was not a large man but was erect and stately. He had a hawk nose and narrow dark eyes under silvery hair. The commander of the fort was in conference with him and both looked at the two messengers from the *Rey Philippe* with interest and courtesy.

When the gentleman wearing the silver-mounted sword introduced himself in perfect Castilian as

Don Ruiz Amador, bearing a message from Don Mateo Perano, who lay sick of a fever, aboard the *Rey Philippe,* Vasquiz expressed his profound sorrow and sympathy and accepted the letter which had been dictated, Amador said, by Don Mateo and penned by the hand of young Don Florez Perano.

"By your leave, Señors." The two bowed courteously, the aide watching Amador closely and imitating his actions with commendable unison.

After reading the letter, Vasquiz pursed his lips thoughtfully and regarded the composed Amador with some anxiety in his eyes.

"Don Mateo Perano has suggested that I send his Majesty's pearl treasure aboard the *Rey Philippe* to-night. I am greatly troubled by this request, Señor Amador, for I am sure Don Mateo could not have realized the condition of La Margarita with five hundred sailors and men-at-arms making holiday in her streets. Many of them are excited by liquor, for they have made continuous fiesta for two days while awaiting the admiral's galleon."

Don Amador's tone held just the right accent of concern and insistence on his errand being satisfactorily accomplished.

"Don Mateo felt sure that the civil forces at your command, Señor Vasquiz, would insure the

safety of the treasure until it was safe in the *Rey Philippe's* boat."

Vasquiz turned to the heavy, deep-jowled man in uniform, whom he had presented as the commander of the fort.

"Señor Valer, the commander, has released all the soldiers for the evening's fiesta in honor of the great success of the pearl fleet and the coming of the armada. In fact, not even the usual reserve guard was retained, for it was, of course, Don Mateo's custom to invite the captains and myself to a banquet aboard the flagship. He never preferred to leave his quarters aboard. We have all held ourselves ready for his expected invitation. I could, perchance, in a short time find a guard—"

The emissary from the flagship had been thinking rapidly. What a stroke of genius to have all the officers of the galleons, the governor, the commander of the fort, and the religious head of the church, all as hostages for ransom!

"The regret of Don Mateo over the delay in his reception of the honorable heads of the civil and military forces," here the fair messenger bowed first to Vasquiz, then to Valer, "as well as his honor, the bishop, is deeper than he was able to express in the brief note he dictated. He hoped that your Excellency would be able to arrange with these personages for an informal conference

with Father Sebastian in the cabin of the *Rey Philippe* in two hours' time, when you could deliver the treasure of his Royal Highness. The captain, by Don Mateo's desire, will sail to-morrow morning at the turn of the tide, for he feels that his illness will not be cured until he is well out at sea. Therefore, he is keeping his crew close aboard and preparing for the morning's business."

The calm of Ruiz Amador's manner, his assured tone of expected agreement, could not have been excelled by the haughty Admiral Don Mateo, himself, had the latter been stating his wishes to Señor Vasquiz. The surly, black-eyed aide put aside his suspicion long enough for a glance of reluctant admiration at the poised young officer, who, holding his plumed hat over his heart, was fixing the governor with wide grey eyes that held a curious compelling quality.

Both the governor of La Margarita and the heavy-browed captain of the fort looked relieved. Two hours? Much, indeed, could be accomplished in that time even when discipline had been thrown to the winds on the last night before the admiral had been expected.

"You may assure Don Mateo that our deepest sympathies are his in this affliction God has chosen to visit upon him. In two hours, or at most a little more, I shall visit the *Rey Philippe* and bring with

me the wonderful pearls the fisheries of La Margarita have collected during the year. Father Albian will be most happy to accompany me, as will the chief officers of the fleet, who are all ashore at the present time."

The departure of Señor Ruiz Amador and his aide was accompanied by the most suave graciousness from the governor, though the emissary sensed a desire for haste due to the necessity of securing a guard and assembling the official party from the various haunts of pleasure where they had dispersed themselves.

As the two officers stalked across the plaza to the street that led to the docks, with the aide a step in the rear of his superior, the unhurried pace of the latter made Mortimer swear beneath his breath in hearty English oaths.

"Try not to tread on my heels, brother," the careless words in Spanish tossed over the shoulder of his captain brought the buccaneer to closer attention. "Haste is most foolish when the need of it seems not apparent," came the further warning. "Remember, moreover, if an emergency should arise an English oath jolted from thy loose tongue would reëcho like a cannon shot in this nest of his Castilian Majesty. If swear you must, practice your linguistics."

The two crossed the crowded plaza without

attracting any undue attention and plunged into the short street toward the quay. After the flare from the plaza the dimness of this way was heightened and Mortimer, unseen, drew his thin, sharp knife entirely from its sheath. Lights streamed from the doors and windows of the drinking houses that lined the street. Drunken sailors reeled noisily in and out of each door. The two richly dressed officers, strolling unaccompanied, attracted more and more noisy comment as they progressed toward the shore. Redlegs ignored this but he kept to the middle of the street and when, from a dark passage between two dives which were illy lighted, a trio of dark forms flung at them in the sinister silence of wolves, his action was instant and as silent as their attack. He fell back till he stood side by side with Mortimer, and the first slashing blow of his silk-and-lace-clad arm was aimed at Mortimer's wrist where the thin knife flashed.

"Fool!" He remembered to hiss this in Spanish. "Wouldst bring the pack upon us? Fists, man! At them!"

Even as he spoke he sidestepped, tripped the leader, and, bending over, gave him a sharp blow at the base of the neck with the edge of his open hand. Mortimer had engaged the second and the two were struggling with sharp whistling breaths. As the third paused uncertainly at the sight of the

burly leader lying silent on the ground, Redlegs saw the movement of others in the passage. He turned his head toward the water and his clear voice rang like a bugle across the quay to the dark water. "Aho! Ivemay!" Then he sprang at the third assassin. A knife caught a flash from a distant light. Redlegs was barely able to swerve so that it slashed the silver lace of his vest. His arm swung but a bare ten inches as he gave one of his chopping open hand strokes, which caught the knife hand of the thug. The fellow groaned and the knife clattered on the hard coral of the street. Mortimer had silenced his man and was feeling over the pavement for his prized thin-edged knife.

An answering "Yohoo! Tulleribuloo!" had come from near at hand across the water and the sound of oars being plied rapidly by strong arms gave warning of reënforcements at hand.

The second man, disarmed by Redlegs, had closed in, attempting to throttle him with the unnumbed left hand while encircling his neck with the right arm. At such close quarters another chopping blow on the side of the neck delivered by a hand half covered with rich silver lace, made the brigand drop coughing to his knees with both hands at his throat. Redlegs laughed, and no one would have mistaken that laugh for a Spaniard's

though the words that followed were drawled in that courtly language.

"Aye, think twice, dogs of drunken sea thieves, ere ye think to filch a fat purse so easily. The biter bitten is a pleasing sight. Let be, Mortimer, let be! Let the licked cubs crawl into their kennels. Come, man, here are our honest hearties, who'll be bawling in broad Saxon if we close not their mouths for them. Haste thee, Mortimer! Leave thy knife or I'll boot thee into the boat."

Ivemay, who had drawn the ship's boat up to the quay, would in a moment have given tongue as he hastened to his leader's assistance. He was greatly relieved to have Redlegs back in his care, disheveled as to attire, but laughing at the discomfiture of the gang of shorehouse thieves.

Ivemay had had a bad half hour dodging the boats coming in from the ships in the harbor, each full of sailors shouting greetings which the buccaneers dared not return. Redlegs ceased his laughing.

"Haste, Ivemay, haste! We have not two hours to take the *Sancta Cecilia* and the *Marie Therese* and prepare a reception for the governor, the capitan, the commanders of the fleet, and heaven knows what other dignitaries! Haste, man! Minutes are golden this night. All the stars are propitious. Margarita is ours!"

CHAPTER VI

THE CAPTURE OF THE FLEET

AN hour before the white moon of the tropics was due to rise over the purple of the harbor's star-strewn waters, a long boat with a boarding party of twenty-five men pulled from the *Rey Philippe* toward the *Marie Therese,* the galleon that lay to the rear of the flagship and farthest from the fort and the town. Captain Redlegs had counted on the fact that, with most of the men on leave and the general feeling of security, the taking of this galleon might be accomplished without an alarm that would reach the shore. His orders were brief.

"Best call for a ladder and announce a message from the flagship. Less chance for an outcry." Not a pistol had been allowed to the party. This was to be an attack by stealth, or at worst knives and cutlasses would be used.

The ladder was found down, since the boats from the shore were expected at any hour. The watch on the galleon was even more perfunctory than Redlegs had counted upon. His party climbed silently to the deck, leaving only Dependence El-

lery in the boat. No sign of a watchman to give warning was apparent. Noise of merriment came from the forecastle and the great cabin was but dimly lighted.

"Peter, stand by the door of the cabin, first making sure there is no one on the stern. The men of the forecastle must be bound and gagged without a cry from them to startle the harbor."

Nothing could have been more silent than that approach of the buccaneers. Barefooted all, they came to the door of the cabin without the group drinking there being aware of a sound. A quiet voice from the doorway, speaking in polished Spanish, brought the guard to their feet with the confused humility of men caught in a dereliction. The boatswain, thinking this was an officer from another galleon, struggled with a mumbled apology.

"From the flagship," was the curt word from the officer in the door. "Where are all your officials?"

"On shore, sir. Only the fourth officer and the steward are in the cabin. All the gunners are ashore. We five here were just making a—a small celebration for the coming of the flagship."

"On the whole galleon only seven of you left?" The tone seemed to the watch to be full of scorn, though Redlegs was, in reality, smothering his

desire to laugh at the ease with which a thirty gun ship had been captured. He moved forward and drew a pistol from his belt, the only one in the party and intended solely for psychological purposes. Behind him the door suddenly filled with faces that were un-Spanish and sinister. Red-faced, blue-eyed Ivemay could be nothing but Saxon. Other scarred visages were as piratical as they were English.

So stunned were the guards that the pistol in Redlegs' hand was entirely unnecessary. Even when laid hold of and bound hand and foot they seemed to have not the least ability to protest. Redlegs laughed aloud, now, and hurried toward the poop where Laffery, a dim figure outside the door of the great cabin, waited with cat-like patience as he listened to the ribald voice of the fourth officer, who, over a bottle of Oporto, was regaling the obsequious steward with tales of his exploits in Porto Bello when the English attacked that fort.

In the dim cabin, lighted only by the candles on the table, the officer presently became aware that a shape stood behind his chair. He threw himself aside and glanced up, evidently expecting the boatswain who had been left in charge of the deck. He looked into a laughing pair of blue-grey eyes beneath a sweeping scarlet plume.

"Up, my mannikin, up! Salute Redlegs, the commander of the fleet."

The Spaniard struggled to his feet and blinked owlishly.

"Redlegs? He's a damned English pirate who fought at Yucatan. He always wears—"

The drunken mumble stopped in awe-stricken silence as the intruder stepped back and the candlelight fell upon his high scarlet boots. There, behind this figure, crowded men who could be naught but the daredevil English pirates with swords and daggers in belts. In a moment the last two on the *Marie Therese* were helplessly bound and gagged.

"Canst find a stout hole to stow them in, Laffery? How many men will you need to hold the ship against the returning boat crews and lay them by the heels?"

"Two of us could handily care for them as they come up the ladder. I'll warrant not a cry to a load, sir."

"But the great guns at sunrise, Peter. To fire a salute at the fort to show that the fleet is really ours you will need—twenty, say?"

"Nay, fifteen of Ivemay's trained gunners can make a grand show with the cannons. I'd take shame to me to need more on this rocking castle. Loading ahead, and training on the fort and the

galleys, we can give the looks of a full-manned ship. Go about, Captain, and get the sister of this forsaken floating fort whiles the carnival do be at its noisiest." And just this Redlegs did.

Stopping but long enough at the flagship to pick up another dozen of his men, Redlegs pulled in the same cautious silence to the *Sancta Cecilia,* whose six foot poop lanterns swung on the tide ahead of the *Rey Philippe.* Here the surprise was almost as complete as that upon the *Marie Therese.* It is true a watchman met the captain when he stepped from the ladder to the deck, but Redlegs' quiet statement that he was a messenger from the *Rey Philippe* threw the Spaniard off his caution so that Mortimer's thin sharp knife was at his throat before he was aware of anything sinister about the party from the boat. As the party divided, to the fore under Ivemay and to the cabins with Redlegs, Mortimer silently slit the guard's throat and dumped him overboard, muttering:

"At last thou hast thy taste of blood, good point!"

At the sound of the splash Redlegs sprang with all speed for the poop, but before he reached it an officer appeared at the rail.

"What was that, Pedro?" the officer called. Then as he became aware of the group ascending the ladder, "What's this?"

Before he could lift his voice in a shout the quiet laugh of Redlegs made him pause.

"Pardon, I pray, sir, our lack of ceremony but I am from the *Rey Philippe*. I have a special message."

These words from this leader of the strangers on board the *Sancta Cecilia* made the officer pause long enough so that Redlegs had time to reach the poop and stand before the Spaniard. At this moment a shout was heard from forward, where Ivemay had reached the forecastle. Instantly Captain Redlegs, with a sudden swift motion of his wrist, presented the point of his sword at the officer's heart.

A shuffling and several shouts came from forward but in a few moments there was silence there.

"How many are aboard the ship and where are they? Answer briefly and quietly and your life will be spared."

There was no fear in the officer's face; only a great amazement. He seemed not yet able to believe that this could be the work of human beings. Surely only demons of the air could attack a galleon in the heart of a protected harbor. His superstitious fear nearly cost him his life, for he delayed to answer until the prick of the sharp steel pierced his flesh and he decided that, if demons, they must be very material ones.

"There is no one in the cabins. There is feasting ashore and a great religious service in the cathedral, for Father Sebastian, on his way to Rome, will be in La Margarita this very night. Five men are forward and four who are ill with a fever are between decks."

"Search the ship, Ivemay, and then dispose of your prisoners in a cell somewhere." Ivemay had come to report that the deck had been taken by the buccaneers.

"There are no prisoners forward, sir. They came to the door at the splash and we were obliged to silence them quickly."

The leader's eyes fell upon Mortimer. "For the second time in one night, sirrah, thy desire for blood hast clouded thy narrow brain. Even now we may have the wasps buzzing about our ears to discover the cause of this outcry."

"Shall I cut his throat, sir?" Ivemay's cutlass was out and at Mortimer's neck. That bloodthirsty pirate stood motionless and silent, disdaining to ask for the quarter he hated to grant to others.

"He who endangers the whole of his comrades on so desperate a foray as this has forfeited his own life. Yet, because thou art a bold rascal, and a fighter after my heart, I spare thee again."

"I make bold to say you make a mistake, sir."

Ivemay always spoke his mind without rancor and without fear. "This man is for himself without thought for others at all. Best finish him now, sir."

"Nay, I will try him yet again." Redlegs' attentive ear could catch no sign that threatening attention had been attracted from the other ships in the harbor by the unfortunate outcry on the *Sancta Cecilia*. Evidently any noise on this night was attributed to the carousing on shore and aboard.

"Do not approach closely the sick who lie below deck, Ivemay, lest you take an illness. Train your broadside on the town; the cathedral is a good mark. Sight the quay with the bow guns. You can control any attempt on the part of the men-at-arms to attack at close quarters in the boats. At sunrise, I shall give the signal for the gun attack which will prove to the city that we have complete control of the fleet. I will take this officer and make him messenger to the town to treat for ransom for all the civil and naval and military officials, and for the citizens of the town separately." Redlegs laughed again as he watched the new amazement grow upon the face of the petty officer.

"Yes, Señor, we are in force sufficient to enforce all these demands. The *Marie Therese* and the *Rey Philippe* are already in our control, as you

now see the *Cecilia* to be. I shall allow the governor, Don Vasquiz himself, to give you orders about the ransom, which the priest must take it upon himself to raise. He will be delighted, I am sure, for he must be aware that Father Sebastian, the famed and holy, is one of our hostages."

"Father Sebastian! God would not permit!"

A gay shout of laughter, first from Redlegs and echoed by the band of buccaneers, answered this protest.

"Ah, a peculiar weakness of the Spanish, permit me to point out to you, Señor, is their belief that God Almighty is the particular and private God of the subjects of his Castilian Majesty. However, let us not hold any inquisitions and religious courts here. Come, we must return to the *Rey Philippe* ere my illustrious guests arrive for the informal reception that Father Sebastian is holding for them."

CHAPTER VII

OUR LADY OF ROSES

ACROSS the dark water Captain Redlegs returned to the *Rey Philippe*. Her bow lanterns were three and the glass about them was of a golden yellow. They illumined the figurehead, which was a beautifully carved statue of his Majesty, clad in armor of gold and bearing a golden sceptre. The immense lantern at the top of her three tiers of cabins had been lighted. So large was it that ten men could stand within it and its glass was a deep crimson so that it gleamed in the night like a rose.

"By the Rood, Ellery, she is beautiful, yon floating palace. But she is awkward to handle in the wind and ill to fight from, with no protection to her decks, and her guns set at an angle as if they were expected to aim at the moon or stars or a ship flying through the air. Her high castle, bonny though it be to look upon, would swing in a storm like a starling's nest in an elm tree's top. But all her faults aside, she is like to a queenly woman with a red rose in her bosom and love-light in her eyes. Methinks I can write a sonnet

on her when the white moon lifts his eye above the mountains behind the town."

"Speaking of women," Ellery's tone was full of concern, "that Rosita woman is like to have the crew by the ears. I heard her purring like a pussycat after the cream, close up to Scarface as he stood before her door, and he twiddling his toes and looking shy like a lad at his first stile tryst. Best change her guards every turn of the hourglass, at the longest. Even then most of them are soft matter in her hands, for she be a master worker."

Redlegs laughed, but complained that his lyric had vanished at the thought of Doña Rosita, who to his mind was no fit subject for a poem.

"We've little time to prepare for our guests from the town. Do you, Ellery, take charge of the deck and have your waits ready for the reception of so official a party. I must prepare Father Sebastian, who is to be the host, with Redlegs at his ear in lieu of his familiar spirit."

Chessman met Captain Redlegs at the top of the ladder. Consternation was twisting his scarred face into a hideous mask, and he was wringing his hands like a maid caught with a broken pitcher.

"Speak out, man! I can see you have earned the burning matches and the thumb twist. If she's

done any harm you'll get them before I attend to anything else. I think you, swinging from the main yard, would make a fine spectacle for the shore party to meet on their arrival. An illustration of what they might expect if their ransoms came not speedily."

The tone was scathing and the gleam of the young captain's eye was an unpleasant thing to face.

"Aye, that I deserve it I cannot deny, sir, but would I let any harm be done, I ask ye? She would see yourself in the cabin, whatever, and I could not manhandle such a queen as herself do be. She be waiting ye, sir, in the great cabin."

"It appears that Chessman does, as you suggested, Ellery, prove soft matter in her hands. Take him away and set him to training the port guns on the galleys that lie yonder. Keep him busy, and a prod or two with your musket butt may make a proper impression on his softness. Yonder light proclaims the coming moon. I've little time to spare. Away, Ellery, ye know what's to do."

Redlegs paused before he entered the cabin to take one last look at the harbor he had mastered. Below the hulk of the mountain lay the crescent of the town, whose music came trailing across the water even as its lights were waveringly reflected

in the ripples. Before and to the rear of the flagship rode the lights of the galleons, and off to port lay the dim shapes of the slave-rowed galleys. The crimson lantern aloft shed soft light down the cabin bulwarks, turning them into a fairy-like palace. In this beauty-softened mood Captain Redlegs entered the cabin of the *Rey Philippe* and paused at the vision there. He was a gallant enough figure himself, with the light from the high silver lamp twinkling on his sword hilt and pistol butts, picking out sharply his scarlet boots and brilliant plume. That plume, as he lifted his hat, swept in a gallant circle that touched the shining floor and ended over his heart.

The beautiful woman who sat facing him at the table seemed to have gathered all the rose radiance from the poop lantern and wrapped it about her for a garment, and all the mystery and starshine of the tropical night had been gathered into her melting eyes and soft banded hair. About her neck hung a string of priceless rubies which slid over her white fingers like crimson haws gleaming through snow. Her rose-red lips curved gently as she smiled into the softened, beauty-admiring eyes of the young pirate chief.

"La Doña Rosita, Lady of the Roses, Rosamunda! Ah, Señora, you are like a gleaming jewel enclosed in this gilded casket." He brushed his

hand across his eyes. "Methinks success and the sweet beauty of the night have driven me fey."

The Señora rose and moved close to him. Her coming was like the heady warm scent of roses in a close sunny garden. Her voice was throbbing, low.

"You will come with me to my home on a mountain top, where the great white stars wheel all through the night and where the fragrance of flowers makes one drunk with beauty? Ah, Señor, my mountain top at Cartagena is love's own resting place."

"A home on a mountain top! . . . But my mountain, Señora, is wrapped in the white mist of fog, its stony sides are covered with stunted heather, and the eyes I see, Señora, are like the blue harebells that fringe its tumbling burns."

She had taken his hands softly in hers and his first answering words had been like one uttering his heart's deepest longing. Perhaps her soft smile permitted a gleam of triumph, perhaps her touch betrayed her inner self. Suddenly his hands had twisted and held her own in a firm grip, his dazed eyes cleared, turned grey-green, a mocking twinkle across their shine. His last words had the refreshing crispness of high mountain water.

She would not accept this reversal of mood. "Ah, Señor, see!" Her voice held its soft throb.

She lifted the rubies from her neck and, taking his hand, dropped them in a clinking heap that piled up like frozen drops of blood. "They are but a small part of that treasure from Manila, Señor. It shall be all yours, alone, if you will but come with me to Cartagena."

With something like a shiver, Redlegs tossed the rubies into his hat now lying on the table.

"I care little for these stones, Señora Perano. Pearls, now! I bethink me of a cheek like their soft pink fire! These will do for the ransom of the Doña Rosita. The jewel treasure you have already discovered to me."

Unable to disregard the cold indifference that had succeeded his brief softness, the Spanish lady fell back with lips writhing for self-control. She suffered the tortures of the proud.

"You laugh, Señor Pirate! You laugh at Rosita!"

"I do not laugh, Señora. Your malady is that you cannot believe that there lives a man who can be indifferent to your beauty. Aye, and doubtless you nearly proved yourself right for a moment—but the moment has passed. As to the treasure? Well, you have never needed to guard your eyes, eh, Señora? Now I, whose life has depended on reading my opponent's thought before he translated it into action, am an observer. See,

Doña Rosita, where your own eyes directed me?"

He stepped to a mounted silver crucifix which hung above a stand where a censer was shedding faint spirals of blue smoke. With his eyes upon the lady his hand moved across the bottom of the frame, which suddenly glided aside, revealing a niche where a casket rested.

"You looked at this crucifix three times as you mentioned the gems from the Indies. I found them in three minutes' effort afterward. "Listen, Señora, to my last offer. You, having paid your ransom with these gems, will go ashore to-morrow with his Excellency, the Governor. The young Florez shall be entrusted to the guardianship of the priest, Sebastian. The pearls," he glanced from a port toward the city where a flare of torches showed a considerable party embarking, "which are even now on the way to the *Rey Philippe,* I am willing to accept as ransom for the child of Don Mateo, yes, and for the monks, too, since it was Father Sebastian's offer of them that brought me here. The city of Margarita will gather a suitable ransom for the captains of the two galleons, Don Pedro Alaquerdo and Don Jose Perrault, also for the commander of the fort, Don Valer, and his Excellency—"

"Perrault! Valer!" The tone was arresting in its poignancy. "Valer on his way to this ship

with Jose? Oh, Señor, I dare not see him! I pray you, not that!"

"Ah! The Señora's early life was spent here, I remember. Well, one's early mistakes, like chickens, are inclined to come home to roost, is it not so, Señora?"

"Allow me to remain in my cabin. Oh, take me away when you go! This last time I implore you, Señor. I dare not be seen by these. Señor, I love thee truly; make me—"

"So?" The laugh held self-chagrin. Its scorn seemed to the lady to be directed to her. She chilled into stony silence. Her hand slipped into her bosom.

"Toss it on the table! And do it quickly, Señora, lest my patience snap and my courtesy be too sorely tried. That's right, the pretty dagger will make a pleasant memento. Discuss your trouble with the priest and whatever he says for you to do, I will agree. Take you with me, I shall not. 'Twould be safer to toss fire balls into the powder magazine. They will be here in three minutes. Go, and quickly!"

The red of her gown no longer suggested roses and love. The rubies under the lamps looked a pool of blood. The slim figure of Rosita swayed like a striking serpent and her blazing eyes and hissing syllables added to the sinister effect.

"I hate as passionately as I love. Three men I hate, but all of them I hate in you, Señor, the Laughing One. To turn your laughter to weeping that would wring your heart, I would willingly die."

The splash of oars and a hail from the water announced the arrival of the boat bearing his Excellency, Don Vasquiz.

Doña Rosita left the cabin. Captain Redlegs did not laugh as he replaced his hat on his head and carelessly thrust the rubies into his pocket. He was reflecting on the idea that there is, probably, neither in earth nor in heaven nor in hell a creature so desirous of inflicting pain as a woman scorned in love.

CHAPTER VIII

REVENGE

THE old moon, like a battered galleon, had risen above the mountain, flooding the harbor of La Margarita with a wan whiteness like silver fog. The sounds of revelry still drifted from the town, the garish lights still gleamed along the white moon path. A few boats had put out to the ships in the harbor, but most of the men-at-arms would outdrink the night. No startling disturbance had sounded from the galleons. A shout or two, quickly muffled, a shuffle or a splash that seemed unheard or at least went unnoticed save by the wakeful crew on the flagship.

In the cabin of the *Rey Philippe* the conference was proceeding quite successfully—at least from the viewpoint of Captain Redlegs and his men, who controlled the situation.

The party from La Margarita had been entirely unsuspicious of danger. The sight of Father Sebastian and young Don Florez, standing beside the charming officer who had been Don Mateo's messenger to the town, had riveted the attention of all—that is, of all save Don Jose Perrault, the cap-

tain of the *Marie Therese,* who, being a man curious by nature and acquainted with the crew of the *Rey Philippe,* had cast his eyes about the dim deck. He had stopped short with an astonished ejaculation, but a cold steel touched his throat and a voice in his ear hushed his amaze.

At Redlegs' suggestion that the party might be some time in conference, Vasquiz had directed his boat and guard to return to the town. It was evident that this permission to resume their interrupted celebration was most welcome.

It was not until all were seated about the large table in the luxurious cabin, where now reposed the casket of choice pearls selected as the King of Spain's tribute, that the situation became clear to his Excellency, the Governor of Margarita. Don Jose Perrault, because of his acumen, had been led aside at a dagger's point and locked in one of the cabins where a pirate did sentry duty before his door. Doña Rosita was again a prisoner in her cabin.

Dependence Ellery, whose round red face was that of an English country parson, had a guard of half a dozen picked men stationed at the doors and windows of the cabin. Even after the true conditions had been made clear to the officials, the negotiations had moved forward in quiet decorum. None, not even Father Sebastian, dreamed how

slender was the force that held the fleet. So full of calm confidence was the manner of the pirate chief, so well known the desperate fighting prowess of the mad English, that the idea of resistance did not occur to one of the Spanish after it finally became clear to them that the band of Captain Redlegs was controlling the guns that could destroy at will the town and fort.

It had not taken long for the governor to accept the idea of ransom. It might have taken longer to settle the amounts to be assessed for hostages and city immunity if Redlegs had not refused to bargain.

"It is quite certain to me," his tone was gentle in its irony, "quite certain, to my mind, that if this casket contains the gems you have chosen to send to his Majesty, you, Don Vasquiz, have a collection of, let us say, similar value. In fact, considering the ten years you have served as governor, I would be justified in assuming that you have many times that. Therefore, for your ransom and that of El Capitan let us require another casket of pearls. I confess to a weakness for pearls. These—" he drew the silver casket toward him and opened it. The box was a foot long and as deep. The smallest of the gems was as large as a pistol bullet. They gleamed like cool fire against the amethyst velvet of the casket's interior. "These

I am willing to count as the value of Don Florez, son of the late Don Mateo Perano, who died bravely fighting for his ship and his king. These others, the priests and the beautiful young wife who survives Señor Perano, I will include with him, as I hold them of slight value. As for the captains of the galleons, and their ships, a thousand doubloons for each is far too meager a price, as is seventy thousand for the safety of the men, women and children of your fair city. I need only to remind you of the methods men of my trade use in extorting generous payment, for you to acknowledge that La Margarita is indeed fortunate that its captor is Captain Redlegs, whose boast it is that his hands are never reddened by the blood of the innocent.

"There is the ultimatum; discuss it as you please. At daybreak the messenger from you must be sent to the city. I leave you to your discussion and to the wording of that message. Make it effective, Señors, as effective as the balls from the big guns of this fleet."

The discussion was long and earnest after Redlegs had sought the open air. Finally, as the first lighting of the east and the paling stars denoted the approaching sunrise, the boat was dispatched to the shore with the demand for ransom.

As the sun slanted across the island harbor the

bells in the church were pealing wildly and great activity was seen in the plaza. Just to make a visible emphasis to the written demand, at a given signal broadsides were fired from the three galleons. Shots were effective on the fort, some fell dangerously near the galleys, and one ball neatly clipped the bell tower of the church, stilling the clangor of the bells.

As if in response to this roaring of big guns, a tall ship appeared at the harbor gate, a ship whose piled white sails gleamed in the early sunshine, whose banner displayed a cross, azure, on a field of white.

A great shout of joy rang across the decks of the three ships of Spain that lay in the harbor of the pearl island. "The *Azure Rood!* Yohoo! Yohoo! Tulleribulo, yohoo! Yohoo!" Their song rang back again from the hills.

Then, in haste, a boat with a white flag put out from the quay to bring assurance that the tribute was being collected with all dispatch, and would the captain of the fleet but wait until sunset?

All the buccaneers on the *Rey Philippe* had rushed to the deck after the gun display to watch the entrance of their own ship. Past the galley she came, her sails dropping like white flowers in the breeze till, stripped to fluttering tops, she lost headway.

On her poop stood Jem, directing the lowering of her canvas.

"He's bringing the Luck o' the *Rood!* Listen at himself salute!"

Laffery's remark brought a shout of laughter. The little spaniel in Jem's arms was barking sharply. Captain Redlegs leaned over the poop rail and sent his ringing voice across to his ship.

"Aho! for High Bindon. Aho!"

Even as Jem's arm lifted in answer, the deck of the *Rey Philippe* leaped to the roar of a great gun. From beneath Captain Redlegs' very feet came a burst of flame and smoke. The beautiful *Azure Rood,* just ready to anchor, disintegrated before their horror-stricken eyes. It was blind chance, of course, the chance that always renders the accidental discharge of firearms fatal, that sent that one ball into the powder room of the *Rood.*

Redlegs stood like one who has looked into the Medusa's eyes. Laffery, with a shout that brought his comrades to life, dropped with several men into a boat rocking at the foot of the galleon's ladder and before the debris of the shattered *Azure Rood* had ceased to fall, they were pulling away toward the ruin. Ivemay had disappeared as quickly as Laffery. Redlegs still leaned against the rail, his distended eyes watching his beloved ship as,

her whole forward part blown away, she settled into the waters of the bay.

In the same frozen silence Captain Redlegs stood until the boat returned to the side of the galleon, bringing the survivors they had been able to rescue.

Redlegs met Chessman, the first one up the ladder. He carried in his arms a drenched beast that shivered as if it could never stop even after it had crept into the silk coat next to Captain Redlegs' stricken heart.

Chessman's face was horribly contorted and tears were streaming down its wrinkled scars.

"Jem said, sir, 'Take the Luck to the Laird!' He was barely afloat, his side all torn away, but he lifted the wee dog before he sank like lead, sir."

"I dived," Laffery's voice was hoarse. "I dived again and again, but gone he was, sir, entirely, our old Jem!"

"And who?—" It was the first sound that had come from the Captain's stiff lips.

"Aye, I wondered would you be asking that, maybe." Ivemay answered from behind. "Well, look at them."

He had prodded Don Jose Perrault across the deck at the point of a cutlass. The young Spaniard was a sorry sight, begrimed with powder and bleeding from Ivemay's handling of him. Doña

Rosita, looking like a wild woman, was beside Perrault.

"These are the devils, sir. They got to the guns and fired one. May their souls rot in purgatory!"

The woman laughed, a high piercing sound.

"Ah, Señor, you who laugh so easily, you are not laughing now. And why not? 'Tis the grand jest."

"Who guarded her?" The tones were dead. The face of Redlegs was stony.

"Mortimer, sir. It was his trick at sentry."

The young pirate chief still regarded the lady.

"I bribed him with those Manila jewels," she said. "You lose, Señor, both treasure and ship. Think, was the lady not better than the loss?" Her laugh had madness in it. "As for me, Rosita—"

The hostages had crowded to the poop rail.

"Rosita!"

It was a bellow, a roar of gargantuan rage long dammed up in an outraged heart. El Capitan, of the fort, placed one hand on the rail and sprang down to the deck. He slipped and fell to his knees before the raging woman. At the sound of his voice she had become silent. Now, her hands at her throat, she looked at the big Spaniard as one looks in the face of death. At the man's second spring she was in his grasp.

"My wife! You! I have sworn your death!"

Did her anguished eyes seek those of Captain Redlegs? He had turned and was regarding the wreckage of the *Azure Rood.* Señora Perano was a thing of the past.

No one moved while Valer's hands were closed about the throat of his runaway wife. Her first lover, Jose Perrault, watched from the mast, where Ivemay was tying him up for execution, while Valer dragged the body of Rosita to the rail of the *Rey Philippe* and with his hands still clenched about that white throat leaped with it into the waters of the bay. Father Sebastian, with lifted hand, said a prayer for the dead, taken in sin. Doña Rosita had found vengeance—and death.

Captain Redlegs sent word to the city of La Margarita that if the pirate, Mortimer, and the casket unopened were returned to the flagship, the ransom of the city would be cut in half. If he were not found the pirates would be turned loose to loot the town.

All day and all night, men-at-arms, sober and determined, went as with a fine-toothed comb through the town over the hills adjoining the shore.

CHAPTER IX

REDLEGS SAILS AWAY

AT dawn of the second day a boat came to the side of the galleon, bearing, besides the ransom, a lean dark-faced man, bound, with an ebony casket upon his knees. As his eyes met those of his comrades, lined up along the decks of the three galleons, he found no glance of pity nor commiseration. He had broken the first law of the comrades of the sea. His fate was sealed. Within an hour his body was swinging at the jib boom.

The hostages who had been held aboard the *Rey Philippe* were transferred to the *Marie Therese* and the buccaneers gathered on the flagship after the rudders and steering gear of the *Sancta Cecilia* and *Marie Therese* had been so damaged that an early pursuit in them would be impossible. The slaves on the galleys had been released, and most of them came aboard the galleon with the buccaneers to be conveyed to such neutral ports as they might choose.

During the hours these affairs had been conducted on land and sea, Captain Redlegs sat alone

in the cabin of the Spanish ship, while Ivemay and Dependence Ellery took charge of the preparations for putting to sea in the *Rey Philippe.*

Alone, staring across the blue harbor, which was now the grave of his ship and his comrade, Ronald Greaves sat with a tiny silken spaniel upon his knee. The little beast still shivered and whined, even as his master's own heart shook and ached. Ronald wondered if the pain would ever stop.

When the transfer of the hostages had been made and the ship was ready for sea, the sun was near its setting. The hours of darkness would give even the lumbering galleon a fair chance to lose herself in the islands to the north.

The anchors were lifted and the *Rey Philippe,* with small canvas set, answered her helm and drew away from the fleet. From her jib boom dangled the body of the traitor. When the galleon passed the resting place of the *Azure Rood,* Dependence Ellery and his waits played the "Dirge for the Dead at Sea."

Sir Ronald Greaves, in somber black, stood on the stern gallery with the shivering Luck on his arm. The red boots had been discarded forever. As the *Rey Philippe* passed the spot where Jem lay, Ronald snapped the string of blood red rubies and scattered them over the water, now

flaming in the last light of the sun. Then the rainbow tinted sails of the galleon shook out upon the cross spars like great flowers blooming suddenly in bare trees. They filled with the evening trades and the King of Spain's galleon disappeared from Spanish eyes forever. Whether she was beached on some lonely shore and her cargo transferred and divided, or whether she made to some port of the pirate's nests and there was dismantled and rebuilt, none ever knew. As the *Rey Philippe,* men saw her no more.

They tell you to this day, in La Margarita, that when the sun's first rays strike the water of the harbor red gleams can be observed in the clear depths of the anchorage. These the natives call the rubies of Rosita. But no pearl divers, however skillful, have found one of the priceless stones. But all may see, encrusted by weed and shells, the remains of the hull of the *Azure Rood,* the ship of the famous pirate, Captain Redlegs, whom no Spaniard ever heard of after he sailed from the loot of La Margarita in the King of Spain's own ship.

BOOK FOUR

Monsieur Lanor Severg

CHAPTER I

NEVIS

OF the group of four who sat about a table in the card room, Monsieur Severg was the most at his ease, though he had been losing steadily. Not once had a shadow of annoyance appeared in his frank, grey eyes; not once had his flashing wit and gay smile failed to appreciate with exactness each lucky play, each ill-timed card.

Monsieur Severg was a personage in Jamestown, capital of the English possessions in the Leeward Islands. The fineness of his garb marked him as a great beau. In an age when the exquisite vied with the wit for social importance and both excelled the peer who possessed neither, a man who had all three of these marks of distinction rode on the top wave of popularity. To rule Jamestown society was to rule the world, for its baths and mineral springs, together with its beauty and tropical climate, drew to the Island of Nevis all the youth and fashion of Europe during the reign of Charles II.

The Comte D'Abancourt, whose plantations lay

across the channel on the Island of St. Kitts, was the high winner of the evening, but there was nothing in his impersonal response to Severg's running fire of repartee that could have brought to the face of his Grace of Allenway the black anger that dwelt there. The fourth at the table was Sir John Hamilton, Governor of the Isles. His losses had been moderate and his bluff good humor was not easily ruffled. His robust laugh had pointed each of the unlucky plays of the Duke of Allenway.

"Stick to it, Bruce, man," Sir John's wit was not so praiseworthy as his good humor. "The British bulldog wins in the end."

His Grace's answer was a snarl that might have emanated from the canine prototype that Sir John had set up. He flung down a card and D'Abancourt, with a laugh, took the hand, saying:

"The Goddess of Fortune, she was always fickle, Monsieur Le Duc. To-morrow the jade favors whom she scorns to-day."

Allenway sat slouched in his chair, glowering right and left.

Though barely turned thirty, and a well-made man, Allenway's excessive drinking and eating had blurred the fair outlines of his face and body. His bulk robbed his fine clothes of any distinction, while the suggestion of jowls emphasized the heaviness of his wit. Now, while he ostensibly an-

swered Hamilton, he cast a glance of dislike at Severg, whose light good humor, under losses heavier than any of the other players, rendered Allenway's boorishness doubly conspicuous.

"How can an honest Englishman win over a people whose light manners and vile literature and slavish religion are sweeping our country? Titus Oates' sworn story, and the death of the London judge who took it, show the nature of our foe."

The young Comte D'Abancourt flushed and opened his lips, but Severg, at whom Allenway had hurled his clumsy charge, spoke quickly though still lightly.

"My mother was born at Dumfries, so I am assuming that I am as fitted by nationality to make comment upon the tendency of the English court to ape French literature and manners as another Scot may be, Monsieur Le Duc of Allenway. Alas, that I must declare that if the imitation but equaled the original in excellence I should feel called upon to applaud. But no! Corneille's power, as well as Moliere's wit, lie far beyond the ability of the tinkers who style themselves writers of drama, so they gather filth from the gutter to besmear themselves in the name of French realism. One may remark as shrewdly upon their imitation of dress and manners. They copy the angle of genuflection, they observe the

scrape of the silk clad calf, but that gaiety of heart, that elan, that *esprit de joi de vivre,* which is the foundation of a true noble's behavior, eludes their clownish spirit. As to the death of the magistrate who took Titus Oates' testimony concerning a French plot, have not the English enough bravoes living by their wits in the card rooms of London ready to thrust a sword through their own fathers for a golden guinea without need for Titus Oates and his ilk to call up French bogie men to scare stout English hearts, not to say honest ones such as my Lord Allenway's, who wins so constantly that when he sits in a game with one whose wits are as keen as his eyes," Severg bowed to D'Abancourt, "he loses with so ill a grace as to make one regret that imitation of French manners, even a superficial one, is not made universal by royal edict."

This dissertation was delivered lightsomely enough, but with a deliberate drawl that gave D'Abancourt time to regain his poise and the Scottish duke opportunity to consider his own words. Moreover, in spite of his airy touch, Severg's brilliant eyes were looking squarely into those of the boorish lord. Everyone in the Islands knew Lanor Severg for a master swordsman, one who fought as instantly and gaily as he joked. Allenway knew that he would have not the slightest

chance to win any honor, save a pierced shoulder in a bout with Severg. He, therefore, swallowed his spleen with what humor he might, grumbling that he reflected on no man, himself, but liked blunt honesty rather than finicking polish. The reference to his winning brought a dull flush of anger which he dared not vent, for there were rumors that the noble duke did not always play fairly and that he was out of funds to pay his honor debts when he lost.

Dame Rumor also murmured that his Grace hoped to rehabilitate his broken fortunes by a marriage with Sir John Hamilton's sister. Lady Margaret Hamilton was the reigning beauty in the world of fashion at Nevis. Her favors, however, were impartially distributed, though the same omniscient authority whispered that the wealthy and handsome young planter, Severg, received a shade more of her favor than any other of the beaux and nobles who thronged the assembly rooms of the resort.

Monsieur Lanor Severg had arrived in Jamestown some years previous to the coming of Sir John Hamilton as the Royal Governor of the Isles. He had purchased on the side of the mountain a beautiful plantation whose boundaries ran to the very top of that three thousand foot peak, which wore a constant cap of drifting fog. Often

at dusk the entire island, which was simply the base of the mountain, would hide itself in this filmy garment like a nun at her prayers and be invisible even to her sister island of St. Kitts across the narrow channel.

Severg's great mansion lay above the sugar plantings only a few miles from Jamestown, and had the advantage of an ever fresh sea breeze and a view unequaled on the island. Chateau Rien, Severg had named his estate. It had become a center of brilliant entertainment and the young belles of the islands looked sweetly upon its master. That he seemed content to remain lonely in his princely domain was the regret of matrons and dowagers.

For the first time since he had taken up his residence on Nevis, Monsieur Severg had shown more than ordinary courteous attention to a woman. Lady Margaret Hamilton had come out from London to live with her brother only a year before. She had been famous at the licentious court of Charles II for her cool aloofness. It was said that she had sought her brother's protection from the too importunate favorites of his Majesty. Indeed, the moral and political atmosphere of London at the close of the Restoration was not unlike Venice under the de' Medicis. Lady Margaret had said that to live in Nevis was like escaping from the steaming closeness of a hothouse

into the sweetness of a sun-filled rose parterre. She and Monsieur Severg had become great friends.

The game had been resumed after the scant apology of his Grace of Allenway. Hamilton spoke.

"You knew Peggy's friend, Janice Carlysle, Allenway? She was in London during the season a year ago, I believe."

"All London knew the Lady Janice. She and Lady Margaret were inseparable and were the greatest foils for each other, one as black as the other was golden." Allenway was glad to escape to court gossip.

At the name of Janice Carlysle, Monsieur Severg had paused in the act of choosing a card. He sat like one who, with breath suspended, views a moment of high happiness. His wide eyes were fixed upon Sir John, who was occupying a moment with light gossip to remove further the unpleasantness of the past.

"Peggy expects her friend to arrive for the season on the *Loyal Friend* which is due to-morrow. Ballerton and Pamby come by the same ship. With your friends from Paris, whom you are expecting next week," Sir John turned to the Comte D'Abancourt, "we shall be very brilliant in Jamestown. Where Ballerton and Pamby go, there the

London world of fashion follows. Your play, Monsieur Severg."

The gentleman addressed drew a card and dropped it with the air of one asleep. It lost him another fifty pounds, that careless play, but the loss or gain of fifty pounds never brought a flicker to the face of Lanor Severg. He was generally thought to be a French nobleman, for his name and language indicated that his literary training had been received at the court of the Grand Monarch. His manner left no doubt that he was one "born," as the French descriptive word goes. His Spanish, however, was as perfect as his French and he spoke English without the trace of a foreign inflection. He was not a person whom one might question, but it was known that his first account at the bank had been a large one and that his plantation was handled in so efficient a manner that this balance was constantly increasing. In spite of his nightly occupation at dicing or cards in the assembly rooms, conducted in Jamestown by Mr. Monkton after the manner of the fashionable spas in Europe, and the constant gay routs that took place in Chateau Rien, Severg managed his plantings personally, overseeing a community of several hundred souls. Chateau Rien was the model estate on Nevis. Severg's energy was amazing for a white man in the tropics.

The card game was finished presently, leaving the tension between the two most eligible suitors for the hand of the Governor's sister greatly increased. The Comte D'Abancourt left the room with his arm thrust within that of Monsieur Lanor Severg.

Everyone knew that Sir John Hamilton had the warmest feeling for Bruce Beynon, Duke of Allenway, for they had been friends in school. It was in the hope that he might see his sister become the Duchess of Allenway that Sir John had urged his Grace to spend the season as his guest at the Government House. This mansion was beautifully situated in the midst of tropical gardens on the point of land just back of the fort that defended the roadstead.

Presently Monsieur Lanor Severg strolled out upon the terraces where the moonlight lay like white powder. As he waited for his carriage to drive to the steps he murmured to himself, "Lady Janice Carlysle arrives to-morrow on the *Loyal Friend*." His hand was thrust within his breast beneath a frill of fine lace. "The Blue Cross Knight!" The laugh he gave was not gay.

CHAPTER II

RE-ENTER TIGER BALDWIN

WHEN the *Loyal Friend* dropped anchor, all Jamestown had turned out upon the promenade that led to the dock.

Lady Margaret smiled as Monsieur Severg paused beside her carriage.

"You have never seen my Jeanie, Monsieur Severg. Ah! she turns all heads, for she adds to her great beauty the charm of a trained mind. Besides all that, she is just the sweetest woman that ever drew breath. Oh, if I were a man Janice had never remained unwed for five London seasons!"

Monsieur Severg smiled at the beauty's enthusiasm, which, it was quite evident, was sincere.

"One must remember, dear Lady Margaret, that your friend had the misfortune to reign in London beside one who is herself peerless. When the sun is shining one cannot exclaim over the silver brilliance of the moon."

For this speech Monsieur Severg received a smile dazzling in its arch beauty. The shining gold of Lady Margaret's curls, the rose and ivory

of her skin not yet dimmed to the tropic pallor of English ladies long resident in Nevis, and the clear gray of her candid eyes, made her indeed a sun maiden. It would be difficult to find greater beauty, as Severg had implied.

His Grace of Allenway had gone aboard the *Loyal Friend* to greet Lord Ballerton and Lord Pamby, court favorites, cronies of his in London. The captain's gig brought not only the Captain, a powerfully-built, grey-haired man with sleepy eyes, but his most important passengers and Allenway to the dock where Lady Margaret Hamilton awaited her girlhood friend.

Monsieur Severg had withdrawn from the Governor's carriage and was conversing with the Comte D'Abancourt as the passengers from the gig mounted the quay. The eyes of both the men were fixed upon the renowned beauty as a gentleman, handsomely attired in cream-colored silk that set off his profusion of dark curls and flashing large brown eyes, bowed over her hand in assisting her to the dock.

"Lord Ballerton," murmured the Comte, who had spent a season at the court of Charles. "Ah, but the woman! She is a spirit. She is glorious!"

The extravagant praise of the Frenchman was not unmerited by the young gentlewoman who turned from Lord Ballerton to rush with a cry

of "Darling Peggy!" into Lady Margaret Hamilton's arms.

That she was slender and vibrant with the joy of life was one's first impression. Haughty, at a glimpse one might have termed her, for her small head under the wide leghorn bonnet was held high on its flower-stem neck when she thanked Lord Ballerton, but when tenderness and joy rushed into her face at the sight of her girlhood friend, its beauty shook the heart.

"Aye, she's a bonny one!" Which the young Comte may have thought an oddly inadequate estimate coming from Monsieur Lanor Severg.

The exchange of greetings and gossip among the London friends occupied some time before Lady Margaret remembered the Island gentlemen and indicated her desire that they join this informal levee.

Meanwhile his Grace of Allenway had had a word of business to conduct with the Captain. In the midst, the latter had suddenly interrupted the duke. "Who is that dandy with the red plume?"

Allenway had stared a moment at the rudeness, then turned toward the two Frenchmen who were lost in contemplation of the London party. Monsieur Severg was clothed in gray, the soft silver of a sea fog. The only spot of color was a coral plume in his wide hat.

Allenway's smoldering anger at Severg made him forget the Captain's insolence. "He's a blasted planter, who gives himself the airs of a peer of the realm."

The Captain's eyes narrowed as he stared at the thin, alert face with its fine, grey-green eyes.

"A laird, maybe?" he muttered.

"Not so! A French pig who presumes on his sword arm to insult his betters. Lanor Severg's his name."

"Not when I knew him; nor was he a Frenchman nor a planter. I never forget a face I hate."

The Duke of Allenway looked at the scowling Captain with new interest.

"What do you know of him?"

"Nay, I have held my peace for a long time, waiting for the day when it might bring money to my purse and satisfaction to my hate. I must see the Governor. Procure me an audience, your Grace. In six weeks, if you wish that man ill, you will be repaid for that help and your silence."

"I knew he was an imposter! I could feel the deceit in him. The dog aspires even to the Governor's sister."

"So!" Captain Baldwin of the *Loyal Friend* laughed. His Grace drew back a pace. The fellow was most unpleasant. Still, it would be worth much to unmask that smiling exquisite, whose

foreign airs had taken the fancy of the lady whom Allenway had decided to endow with his ancient name. She was at this moment beaming most graciously at him as he bowed with that fatal grace before the English beauty. Undoubtedly he would make another conquest.

"Only bring the Governor to me, my Lord, and await my return in six weeks." The Captain was watching Allenway's face.

Lady Janice had accepted pleasantly the homage of the Frenchman. The young Comte D'Abancourt's extravagance of compliment brought a mirthful smile and a gleam of ravishing coquetry from the eyes set in lashes so dark that one looked twice ere one learned that they were not the soft black of her hair.

When Severg bowed from the hips, hand on heart, after his coral plume had swept the dust, her eyes, unexpectedly as blue as the tropic skies between the piled white clouds, opened wide upon the sea-green ones that held hers as in a spell. The wild rose color deepened in her cheeks. When she acknowledged the quiet welcome to Nevis, which as the oldest resident present he took occasion to offer her, her voice caught like that of one who has been running.

The assembly that night at the Casino was the most splendid of the season. All the wealth

and beauty of the sister islands gathered out of tribute to the London party. The moonlight lay like a silver patina, making the dark mass of the mountain beneath its scarf of fog weirdly distant and turning the terraces beneath the royal palms of Jamestown into a stage for a fairy masque. The soft music of creaming breakers on the beach mingled with the calling of liveried negroes carrying the chairs of beaux and belles. Link boys ran with lights along the promenades. Handsome equipages, drawn by horses whose silver mounted harnesses jingled musically, came from the great mansions about the shore. The song of the fiddles called through the open windows of the Assembly. Soft radiance of many candles mingled with the moonlight.

The entrance of Lady Margaret and her friend was like the coming of majesty at a court ball. Beau Monkton made the deepest of his nicely graduated obeisances. Severg had once observed that one might judge the importance of the arriving party by the angle of Monkton's spinal column.

The Governor's sister was of queenly presence. Tall and finely proportioned, her manner a blending of dignity and graciousness which pleased the taste of the Islanders, she emphasized her vivid blond beauty by having always at her side a tiny

mulatto girl. This poppet, whose garb was fantastically brilliant, was so effective an ornament that many of the ladies sighed to realize that imitation was not possible. To-night the little attendant struggled with a long court train of Brussels lace.

Lady Janice was, at first glance, but another embellishment for the regal presence of the fair Margaret. With a slim delicacy of figure that was somewhat contemned by an age that had developed a voluptuous taste in women, she seemed but a young girl. Her piled dark hair came barely above her friend's shoulder. The carriage of her head, which was held so high that it gave her an air of arrogance, was contradicted by the eager friendliness of her eyes, and one who talked with her for a moment fell a victim to her charm and spirit. The little day moon in the western sky can often make the morning sun seem garishly bright.

It at once became apparent that Sir John Hamilton had already capitulated to the little beauty. He would hardly leave her side, though both Ballerton and Pamby were constantly seeking a word with her, and the young Comte D'Abancourt, with a row of orders blazing across his white satin vest, was never far from her elbow with his effusions of flattering phrase which always won for him a

silvery laugh or a glance of sweet amusement.

Monsieur Lanor Severg did not invade the circle of nobles that enclosed the two beauties. His dress, always noted by those desirous of attaining the latest mode, gave an air of distinction to his lean figure and the heavy locks of naturally curling red-gold hair which was the envy of those obliged to resort to wigs in a tropic climate.

Over a vest and smallclothes of white satin he was wearing a coat of azure blue taffety. The lace at his throat and wrists was as fine as the spindrift that broke on the rocks in the moonlight.

Did he become aware that the blue eyes of Janice Carlysle were seeking someone in the rout of merrymakers? It was late in the night before she found Monsieur Severg at her side asking in that compelling, beautifully inflected voice for the last minuet. Sir John had assumed that this was to be his favor; but, in the face of his protest, Lady Janice found herself treading the measures with one whose grace of movement and strength of wrist challenged all her lissom charm as not even the young Comte had done. She had heard of the rapier-keen wit of Monsieur Severg and his gaiety. She found him strangely silent, might have thought him absent and indifferent save for the brilliance of his strange eyes that never left her face. Her light talk of the beauty of Nevis

and the attractive social life soon fell away before the spell of his manner, which seemed to wrap her in an atmosphere of deep emotion, mystery, and power. In spite of the quiet commonplaces which his voice uttered so lightly, this feeling increased until her heart beat suffocatingly and her breath came too quickly for comfort.

It was Monsieur Lanor Severg who conducted Lady Janice out upon the moon-drenched marble of the terrace when her chair was called. The bemused quiet of his speech and manner had fallen away. For the first time his smooth voice quickened with feeling. The fresh dawn wind was blowing across the eastern sea. He wrapped her dark cloak about Lady Janice's ball gown until only her face shone like a pearl beneath her dark cap of hair.

"What man could endure the realities of the day unless he had the night to feed his dream? Without the moon how could one keep alive that spark of romance and mystery that makes the day endurable? Your face, Lady Janice," his voice became deeper, "means to me a secret garden where dreams bloom in silver light."

The hand by which he led her toward her waiting chair was not quite steady. Her voice, though cool and light, held a breathless quality.

"Then you prefer moonlight to sunlight, Mon-

sieur Severg? Truly, your words are fashioned for it."

"Diana has always a charm that Venus cannot attain. A pearl holds the mystery of the depths of the sea, a diamond is but a pebble on the shore. One must worship the highest beauty when one sees it, and that must be the greatest which brings alive from the depths of a man's soul those dreams which life has seared."

From the shadowy depths of her chair Janice Carlysle's face regarded the gentleman who stood bareheaded in the quickening dawn. She managed to summon a note of raillery into her voice.

"They told me much of your wit and skill with the *bon mot,* Monsieur Severg, but they did not prepare me to meet a poet."

CHAPTER III

THE MENACE

WHEN Monsieur Severg returned to the assembly after placing Lady Janice in her chair, he was met by Comte D'Abancourt, with a request that he make up a table for cards.

"Over thy countenance, my friend, lies that exalted look that shows that one has conversed with the immortals. Fortune, who has blessed you in your *affaires d'amour,* will not smile upon a game of chance for you, perhaps." There was no rancor in the teasing of the Frenchman. He made love spontaneously to every fair face that came his way, but with the lightness and impermanency of a butterfly touching a flower and with as little harm to the flower as to his own polished heart.

"Still," Severg shook himself as a dog that wakes from sleep, "one must live up to his reputation, Monsieur Le Comte. That is the unpleasant consequence of permitting oneself to acquire such an inconvenience. I have never refused an invitation to a game. Certainly I may not now do so for fear of loss. For an hour, only."

The game proceeded in an unusual silence. Se-

verg, whose wit was wont to keep up a constant round of light persiflage which made the game itself a secondary matter, was not in form and could not rise to the delicate bait the Frenchman dangled for him. Lord Pamby had taken the place of the Governor, who had pleaded a press of business for the day. Allenway was striving to repair his earlier losses.

In spite of his silence and abstraction, Monsieur Severg gained with each hand.

Allenway had drunk until his playing was doomed to meet with bad chance. Moreover his temper, never certain, was now evidently seeking a chance for outlet. As Severg dealt the cards, Pamby exchanged gossip with the French noble.

"Yes, Monsieur Le Comte, Sir John has done much to make these colonies a desirable dwelling place for people of some discrimination. The worst danger to shipping has been the sufferance of the pirates and buccaneers who have become so bold that they attack even His Majesty of England's ships. On our trip out we ran all one night without a glimmer of light because our captain saw a suspicious sail at sunset. He had a tale, too, which made his caution justifiable, egad! He told us that some years ago he had been stopped by a band of English dogs of pirates who stole his cargo and burned his ship to the water's

edge. Left him penniless. He's pretty bitter. Sir John told me that he had orders to spare no money to clear these seas of the rascals."

"All planters would be happy to know that their ships of trade might safely proceed," the Comte agreed. "Still, men of reason must agree that without the restraint of these too grasping, though very bold and picturesque fellows, these islands would all have been held by the armadas of Spain. The planters are not fighters, Monsieur. What are the new means that our friend and most excellent Governor expects to employ?"

"Rewards for information leading to the apprehension of some of the most daring, especially those who have interfered with the shipping of Charles, himself, who is very pleased with the Island income, as well he may be."

"May good fortune attend his efforts. The thoroughness of His Excellency at any undertaking is commendable. Are there any especially infamous rogues he seeks?" The Comte's attention was turned upon his hand. He had ceased to attend to the Englishman who, true to his type, wished to give all the information he had upon the subject.

"He has a list of those known to have boarded His Majesty's ships. I cannot remember their outlandish names. 'Tis like reading their gaol rec-

ords, their *noms de guerre*. One I remember was Red Heels. Can you fancy such a name?"

Allenway had gathered up his cards, then flung them down with an oath.

"If you would exchange hands with me, Monsieur Severg, I might be able to play with you."

A dead silence fell. Severg snapped alive, all preoccupation and indifference shed. His eyes narrowed to piercing slits, but his voice was very gentle, so gentle that the half-drunken nobleman felt that his insult had been swallowed.

"When I lose to you, your Grace of Allenway, I am slow to imply that you carry an extra card in your — shall we say too-wide and capacious sleeve?"

As the meaning of the soft words penetrated his dazed mind, the Englishman snarled another oath.

"I shall expose you for that insult, sir."

"Do you mean you will fight me?"

Severg's voice was still soft, with a hopeful intonation.

"I cannot fight with an impostor. I shall unmask you and show that you are not worthy of a gentleman's steel. I—" His Grace paused. His anger and drink fuddlement had led him into a premature expression of the revenge he hoped to wreak upon the French planter.

The Comte had laid his cards down quietly. Pamby stared in amazement at his countryman. Severg uttered but one word, "Yes?"

"Not now—but I will prove it," mumbled Allenway.

Severg arose. "These gentlemen are aware that you are so drunken that one cannot, with honor to himself, hold you responsible for your words. My name, my Lords, is my own, and is as old and as worthy as the Lords of Allenway have made theirs. Unless you apologize to me, in the presence of Lord Pamby and the Comte D'Abancourt, within twenty-four hours, I shall lash you with the flat of my sword up and down the terrace the first time you appear. The point of my steel shall not be soiled with your blood. You are drunk. So!"

Severg's eyes were terrible to see. Both D'Abancourt and Allenway, who had attended Monsieur Severg in a number of affairs of honor, knew that he was able to perform his threat; his voice left no doubt of his intentions. D'Abancourt accompanied Severg from the room but at the latter's desire permitted him to leave the Casino alone.

Two men had paused beside Severg's waiting carriage. They were making a number of comments upon the beauty and fineness of the appointments, much to the gratification of the black

coachman, who in gorgeous livery sat like a statue in ebony. As Severg, in his dress of state, came down the terraces to the carriage the two men turned to survey him.

They were not of the fashionable world which revolved about the section of Jamestown extending from the Governor's mansion next to the fort past the resort and the residences of the Lanton. They had evidently strolled up from the lower region of inns and lodgings about the quays. Now as their gaze wandered from Monsieur's jeweled shoe buckles to the diamond studded pin that held the blue heron's feather in the turned brim of the exquisite's white hat, their eyes distended in amazement. They turned to look into each other's eyes, then again the careful examination of Monsieur continued. The short round man stooped over with hands on knees and turned his head sidewise, first left, then right, as a parrot tests a proffered tidbit. The tall thin fellow covered first one eye then the other, blinking owlishly.

Monsieur Severg, wrapped in gloomy reflections, had not observed them until he was ready to step within the door now held open by a liveried page who had occupied the seat beside the pompous coachman.

"Yes, sir!" The tall man was reassuring the fat one. "It's hisself! I tried each eye one by

one, and each tells me the same story."

"That was powerful strong rum that fat yellow woman at the Black Goat found for us, Peter. Now, as sure as I'm an honest sailing man out of Devon, I do be seeing the Captain just as I see him on his quarter-deck a thousand times. You think I'd best swear off the rum, Peter, dear?"

But Monsieur Severg cut short what bade fair to become a lengthy discussion by giving a great shout of laughter that surely would have been more becoming to a ship's deck than the promenade of fashionable Jamestown. He grabbed a hand of each of the solemnly arguing men, to the great disgust of the dignified driver of his fine black horses.

"By the *Azure Rood!* Ivemay and Laffery! Not a word, lads! Into the coach with ye. Chateau Rien shall have a celebration this day! Who, think you, is my overseer? Who but Ellery, lads! By the Rood, he has a great chorus of a hundred negroes who can sing your souls straight into heaven. Aye, we shall have rare feasting this day—and tales! Ivemay, ye turn me back into a gay young gallant once more. Dost remember the Luck, Charles? And Jem?"

At the mention of Jem, the old shipmates all fell silent.

CHAPTER IV

CHATEAU RIEN

"WE'VE been off the account ever since the *Rood* was lost," explained Ivemay. "We tried hanging out around the island, after you had divided up the treasure and disappeared. The old bite had gone out of things at Tortuga. I'd lost my taste for yellow gals and dirty gin. Seemed like nothing 'ud do for me but old Sussex ale."

"He fixed hisself fine for ale all the rest of his life," Laffery looked solemnly at Ivemay and shook his head. "He married him a widow woman that owned a fine tavern. She thought so much of him, I did decide the sea had lost him for sure."

"Then what must hisself do but buy him a fine ship," complained the fat man. "So I had to leave my tavern and see that himself came to no harm, what with the dirty pirates out of the middle sea lying in wait for every honest ship."

Severg laughed with boyish gaiety. "And now you are in the Islands for an honest cargo, I take it?"

"Aye, but already we feel the itch about the neck that the thought of a rope puts on us. This very island, so they tell us, has a Governor that do be a fury after the old comrades. And how may one know what minute some knowing eye may see us, as witness yourself this very day." Laffery stretched his lean neck, then hunched his shoulders like an unhappy vulture.

"Have you a cargo for home?" There was pathos in the tone of the word "home" on the lips of Captain Redlegs. "Yes? Well, this I have in mind, Laffery. Anchor over at St. Kitts for a while. I heard a word this morning that makes me desire to have a ship, laded, ready to sail at a moment's notice. At St. Kitts your ship will attract little notice from Sir John Hamilton. I can give Ivemay letters to friends who have plantations to sell. Yes, I know, Ivemay, that you do not desire to have a plantation and that the tavern wife wishes you home again. Do not be concerned. You will have a profit to show for your voyage. I can send Ellery to you in an hour, at need."

What with tales of the old days and admiration for the mansion, what with listening to the really marvelous music Ellery's slave chorus was only too happy to provide, what with petting and exclaiming over the Luck, grown fat and wheezy,

the day was a gay one at Severg's plantation. Ivemay expressed himself as almost committed to the idea of owning a plantation with Laffery to carry the rum from it to Devon. They evolved a very excellent plan to put it down at a smugglers' den in Devon so that the estimated profit was somewhat dazzling even to men accustomed to fortunes gained for the taking.

"Steer clear of the law, lads. Suppose you were haled up for revenue cutting and found to be old comrades of the sea? Run straight and you may die in your beds at last like honest innkeepers."

They agreed to accept this advice from one whose prosperous and enviable estate made honesty a virtue to be considered.

The Duke of Allenway made his amends with fair grace before Pamby and the Comte that same evening when Monsieur Severg appeared at the assembly rooms. But there was an undercurrent of assured insolence that rather nullified his assertion that he could not remember what he had said that had given offense.

"When the liquor's in, the truth will out," was a Scotch saying that ran in the mind of Severg, who, nevertheless, accepted the apology though he pondered the Duke's new boldness.

When Dependence Ellery brought him word

that the Governor had just posted a notice offering a thousand pounds reward for any information leading to the capture of any one of a list of pirates known to have looted or sunk English ships, and that among those names was that of Captain Redlegs, Severg felt that here was a puzzle to which he had somehow lost the key.

If Monsieur Lanor Severg failed to follow the opening to the friendship of Lady Janice which that first ball had given him, it might have been assumed by some that he had stood aside to give Sir John a clear field. The Governor failed not to use his advantage, the more as Lord Ballerton had apparently been dazzled by the more voluptuous charms of Lady Margaret. If she had fled his pursuit in London, as rumor whispered, she seemed to have become more vulnerable to love's darts here in the southern warmth. Monsieur Severg, the whisper ran, would probably find himself in the unpleasant situation of the clown who attempted to ride two spirited horses at one time. The Island belles were watching with interest the elimination of the coveted planter.

There came a time, however, when the glory of the white moon was at its greatest splendor, and the mountain home of Monsieur Severg became the scene of one of those brilliant gatherings for which it had long been famous. Planters from

all the mansions in St. Kitts, as well as Nevis, joined the beaux and belles, the dowagers and matrons, the petty officials and peers of the realm, who made the life of the winter resort so brightly scintillating, in a procession that wound up the road to the mountain estate of Monsieur Severg. No one who counted himself as of any social importance would have remained away from a fete given by the owner of the finest house in the Islands. His Grace of Allenway accompanied the party from the Government House. Perhaps he feared to trust his discretion when in liquor, for on this occasion he was cold sober. It may be he had come to realize that Lord Ballerton was as dangerous a rival for the hand of Lady Margaret as Monsieur Severg had appeared, and was making a last attempt to reinstate himself.

The moonlight was like hoar frost over the fields of cane and rendered the sea white and mysterious. The fresh breeze lifted the fog from the mountains, trailing it like a silvery veil off to the eastward. Before morning it would fold in about the Island's foot, wrapping fields, houses, and city in a dripping shroud. As the carriages climbed the mountain side, strains of music floated down from the great house brilliant with a thousand candles.

"How enchanting!" Lady Janice cried. "It's

like no earthly harmony. It seems the spirit of the mountain itself."

"There was never any such singing." Lady Margaret was pleased at her friend's enjoyment. "Monsieur Severg does all things better than other people. He has a queer, fat overseer who seems to have wonderful power over the negroes. Everybody knows there is something in their voices that no other people have—a mournful tone that contrasts oddly with their childish merriment. Take, my little poppet, Cleopatra. She can look the saddest thing in the world and her voice would melt a marble statue, but all the while the imp is playing some monkey trick or other."

Still chanting eerily, with a dreamy melancholy as elusive as the charm of the perfect night, the voices guided them along the avenue to the wide doorway where Monsieur Lanor Severg waited to receive his guests, each lady receiving the same angled obeisance until the arrival of the ladies from the Government House. To each of them the bend was a bit more sweeping. Lady Janice felt again the disturbing power of his direct glance.

The music for the dancing was provided by a group of the same flashing-eyed negroes who had chorused the guests up the mountain. They were a very effective part of the decorations of the hundred foot salon that lay across the front of

the mansion. In a low balcony they sat in their liveries of blue and gold, beating away on drums and viols with all the energy that primitives have to waste. Lady Janice remarked to her host as she opened the ball with him, an honor that set every lip to whispering, that the slaves seemed to be able to get some elegiac quality even into their drums.

"You should hear their African music. There is a weirdness about its very monotony that creeps along the blood. In the morning I will have them play for you without Ellery's civilized rhythms."

The party from the Government House had been asked to remain over for another day and night so that a picnic might be enjoyed on the mountain top.

In spite of his desire to talk with the beautiful Lady Janice and explore the fresh intelligence which his brief conversations with her had disclosed, Severg was too perfect a host to take advantage of the opportunities his house provided. Sir John's dignity must be considered. So Monsieur Severg was, as usual, impartial in his attentions and flattery. Her Grace, the dowager Duchess of Mertyn, seventy years young and still lightly trotting the measures of the dances, smiled at her gracious host as coquettishly as any Island belle.

Altogether the junket was a wonderful occasion, from which the guests did not depart until the fog had draped itself about the plantation and the torches of the departing carriages were suddenly blotted from sight in its moist density within a few yards of the door.

CHAPTER V

OLD DREAMS

WITH the rising sun there comes a freshening sea breeze which unwraps Nevis from its nightly shrouding of fog. It is like the lifting of a curtain, that unveiling, and to see it is worth the loss of some hours of sleep. Few of the fair sex in Nevis, where nightly dancing the year round was the custom, ever saw the phenomenon. To Monsieur Lanor Severg, who had never relaxed to the idleness which the tropic heat makes so tempting to the northerner, the early hours of the morning were the choice portion of the day.

As he descended the grand staircase into the hall, already cleared from evidences of last night's celebration and made sweet with blooming sprays, and permeated with the fragrance from gardens brought through all the eight long windows by the sea breeze, a sudden uproar from a small room opening from the hall back of the stairway made him smile. It was a miniature uproar, made of a raucous squalling and a wheezing, rasping noise like a rusty iron hinge in need of oil.

Monsieur stepped in the doorway of the small

room and laughed aloud as he had not done now for nearly a month.

The room was an intimate sort of place. A table piled with books and papers indicated that it might be a workshop. A low couch filled with linen-covered pillows faced the French windows which opened on a stone terrace. A restful view of the mountain slope, with a bit of distant sea, was offered through these windows. Just now one of them framed Lady Janice Carlysle, looking like the Goddess of Dawn in a rose-colored morning gown of mousseline. Her arms were filled with flowers, for no true Englishwoman can leave a garden without bringing with her a trophy to adorn the house. Just now her expressive face wore a comical look of dismay, for to have started such an outrageous noise at this hour in a quiet country house was most unguestly conduct. A small fat spaniel braced himself before her, doing his best imitation of a savage watch guard. His wheezing barking was like the rusty gate hinge. A scarlet and pink macaw flapped his wings, waddled up and down his three foot perch, lifted his crest and made of himself a whole barn lot full of peafowls giving notice of robbers.

At the sound of Severg's laugh the whole storm in a teapot subsided. The little dog, with most absurd waggings of his entire small self, came

complacently to his master's feet, flattening out abjectly, however, at the reproachful, "Nay, nay, Luck! Canst not recognize a friend?" The parrot smoothed his feathers, cocked a round eye at the lady and murmured self-congratulations at being able now to shift the responsibility for the whole affair to more efficient shoulders.

"Oh, the darling poppet! Let me hold him."

The goddess dropped her flowers and her godhead and turning into a little girl sat on a cushion.

"He's just the image of my little Prince Charlie, who died of old age just a year or so ago. I'd had him nearly all my life. You call him Luck? What an odd name."

"Oh, he bears real names suited to his lineage and history. He has Don Philippe, Josephe, Mateo, Miguel, Juan—and others. It takes a fine long breath to utter all the titles he so justly carries. He came originally, I believe, from the court of the great Philip V. Because of those names he accumulated, he has acquired the simpler, but very descriptive name, the Luck."

"It may make sense to him," the girl confided her opinion to the ancient spaniel who was now sniffingly investigating her person after the manner of friendly old canines who wish to make certain that no future mistake shall occur. "Myself, I think all that is pure tosh.

"He is ashamed to admit that his famous luck at games of chance is due to his possession of you," she continued. She was now curled up on a mat that lay on the stone floor, her billowy muslins spread like a nosegay of pink English roses about her.

Monsieur's eyes said quite plainly that he found her the fairest thing and the most lovable that the blue arch of the sky embraced. Had he put his feelings into the superlative terms of the age, the lady felt that she could have handled the situation with her accustomed aplomb. His eyes she found strangely disconcerting, so she hid from them by bending her dark curls over the now very contentedly snuggling dog.

"I won't deny a very firm belief in amulets and charms." Monsieur's hand rested over his heart. His eyes were upon a very fine gold chain that lay about the base of Lady Janice's slim neck and disappeared beneath the lace at her breast.

"Oh, do you believe in them? Of course, I know that signs and charms are the refuge of the ignorant mind, as my father always told me, but I do feel more secure from harm when I wear a lucky piece."

Would she show her amulet? Monsieur wondered. But no, her agile mind was away to another subject. She was one whose mind worked

so fast that her remarks often sounded incoherent to a sluggish intellect. Her eyes and hands did half her talking.

"The mountain top, Monsieur Severg? Can one really go up? It will be hours before Peggy is awake, or any of the party."

"There is a path for chairs and plenty of strong shoulders." Monsieur's was a brain that could follow most devious windings.

"Chairs!" The girl sprang erect with the ease of a fine body that even billowing yards of muslin could not strangle. "Have I not followed the hounds afoot over the Cheviots? If chairs can go, I can walk. My father, Monsieur Severg, had no son left from the wars so he trained me like a boy. He would think shame if his daughter should choose hothouse burgeoning. May we go now?"

So it was that Lady Janice Carlysle, with overdraperies flung over her arm and a wide hat tied under her chin, strolled up a path that followed a mountain stream not unlike the Scottish burns. The foliage along the brook was very different from the spiky gorse and heather of the north, however. It was thick jungle, with vines and creepers that even Monsieur's care could not prevent from straying across the foot trail. As they came from the path onto a wide grassy shelf where the stream became a pool catching the water from

a rock spring, a swinging tendril caught the fine gold chain about the Lady's neck. Her hurried movement forward at the sight of the unparalleled view of sea and far flung islands that lay before her, snapped the strand of gold and jerked some bauble from her bosom into the bushes.

"Oh! My lucky piece!"

The lady's distress was needless. Monsieur's eyes had not once left the lovely, ever varying face during that all too short climb to the top of the world. His glance marked the spot where the trinket fell and in a moment he was returning to her a locket, at sight of which his heart had felt a sickening slump. He had counted more than he knew on finding another sort of lucky charm on that chain about the fair neck of Janice Carlysle. But at a second glance his eyes flamed, for on the reverse of the locket were the arms of his house, a broken fetter.

Did the girl feel the compulsion of his glance? When they were seated on the stone bench beneath a low growing shade tree, she turned the trinket in her hands and said softly, as if she were speaking to herself:

"Are you one, Monsieur, who has found that the dream is so much more real than reality? You spoke of dreams one night."

" 'Tis the dream in the heart that makes reality

endurable." Monsieur's tone was low; it held a huskiness as he added: "But when the dream comes true? Can it come true and still remain the cherished dream, Lady Janice? Can it be like the grain of sand transformed into the miracle of the pearl to be worn on the breast of beauty?"

"I know not what happens when it becomes reality—yet." The last word was faint; her eyes were hidden. "Only this I do know: The realest person in the world to me is my dream knight. I was only a tiny girl, not yet nine, when I knew him. He wore a hunting suit of green velvet and a red plume in his hat. He told me a tale of a lovely lady and her knight. He gave me a trinket to cherish. When I told my father the tale, he laughed and brought to me a volume in red leather, stamped with gold. It was years before I could read all of the story, but I read it many times and that boy's face was always the face of the knight. He had come to live in my imagination, you see, for I never saw him again. When men have flattered me and sought my love, I have always looked in their eyes in search of that gaiety, that charm of the dream world I saw once in a boy's eyes. But I never found it, Monsieur.

"He had given me a trinket. With a child's fancy I endowed it with power to bring me happi-

ness, so I always wore it—even when I had grown tall. My father says I never grew up.

"Once we had a guest in the house, my mother's girlhood friend from Scotland. I met her alone in the library and her dark eyes, under her crown of white hair, were pools of dreams. I found that she, too, lived in a world of dreams. In my idle fashion I was playing with the chain that held my lucky trinket. Suddenly her eyes grew wild.

" 'What have you there, little Janice?' Her voice startled me. Then I told her about my knight. I have never spoken of him to another person, save now to you, Monsieur Severg."

Her host did not speak. Perhaps he was unable. He lifted her hand to his lips.

"Lady Joan Greaves wept when I told her my story; slow big tears that she did not wipe away but let fall upon the ring set with a cairngorm that I had put into her hands. ' 'Tis Ronald's signet,' she said. Then she told me what had happened to my knight, and I knew then why he had never come again.

"He had been sent by the Puritans to the Island of Barbados, Monsieur Severg, to be a slave—my knight! When King Charles came back to the throne Lady Joan had sent to the island to find Ronald but he had escaped and none knew what had become of him.

" 'But he is not dead, Janice,' she said to me. 'We have the sight, we Monnaives, and I see him on the sea. He'll come again some day.' Then she gave me her locket and asked me to let her take the signet. See, Monsieur!"

Lady Janice opened the locket she had been turning in her hands. On a thin shell was painted a miniature portrait of a boy of fourteen. The thin, high-bred face of him, the brilliant, merry eyes that held the dreams of youth, were blurred to the eyes of Monsieur Lanor Severg. He did not see the smile that trembled on the lips of Lady Janice Carlysle as she looked from the boy's face to the man's that bent above it.

"That, Monsieur, is my dream."

"What of the reality?" Severg shook himself and spoke with brusque force. "The youth disappears into the world for twenty years, and two women with dream-filled eyes expect him to return a—well, say a knight. Have you considered what brutality and labor can do to a boy? Have you remembered that these Islands are full of robbers, murdering pirates, degenerates, some of them with noble blood in their veins, and all the more cruel for that fact, perhaps? Had your boy failed to become such as these, do you think he would not have returned to a mother like the one you have described?"

Janice Carlysle's head was flung up now to its most arrogant height. Her eyes, wide and indignant, met the desperately questioning ones of Serverg.

"You need but to look at that face, Monsieur Severg, to know that Sir Ronald Greaves could never become base, whatever life may have done to the dreams in his heart. A pirate he may have become, for there was a pirate ship at Bridgetown the very night he fled, so Lady Joan discovered. That may explain his long absence. What pirates may be and do, alas, I know too well. Sir John can talk of little else but the disgrace to England these sea robbers have become; and he glories in recounting horrible details of their exploits.

"Still, and in spite of the worst that can be said, I know that Ronald Greaves, if he fought the Spanish ships and looted Spanish towns, as pirates do, did it gallantly as his father fought the Puritans. And when he was able to do so I am sure he ceased from pillage and lived as a gentleman should. See why I am sure of that, Monsieur Lanor Severg?"

It was a lovely, whimsical smile that played about her lips as she took a brooch from her breast and with its sharp pin began to scratch a word on the worn back of the gold locket that she had cherished against her heart for many years. It

was a pity Monsieur could not see her face. He slipped his hand into the breast of his finely ruffled shirt, indecision and uncertainty stamped on his sensitive face.

Presently she held her handiwork before his eyes. Under the name Ronald Greaves, which had once been inscribed there by a goldsmith, she had written—lanoR severG. Her sweet laugh was tremulous. "Think you, sir, one trained to love words does not see them backward or forward, up or down, an acrostic or a rune?"

Then Monsieur opened his hand before her and when she looked upon a cross of enamel, azure as her own eyes, fleury with gold engraving, her face was a thing to make a man's heart turn over in his breast, especially a heart that had held the memory of her blue eyes for near twenty years.

Lady Janice laid her locket against the childish cross, placing her own two hands above them. Then she looked Ronald Greaves in the eyes.

"Has the dream come true, then, Sir Knight?"

His hands closed over hers but he hesitated yet for a question.

"If trouble or disgrace should yet come to me, Janice?"

"That reality shall be ours together, if it comes, Ronald. Oh, Ronald!"

He would have been less than a man if he had resisted that tender voice, that quivering smile any longer. He took her to his breast and what his lips whispered in her ear not even the leaves on the tree above them could have heard. But it must have been very satisfying, for the eyes of Lady Janice were as radiant as the washed sky after a rain when, after a long time, she and Ronald finally strolled down the path to the mansion. The top of a mountain, she said, was the most perfect place in the world to consider dreams.

The picnic at sunset on the mountain was a great success, declared Lady Margaret. The guests were carried upward in chairs on the stout shoulders of blacks who sang as they climbed. After the sun had set, the return through the forest, lighted only by the great moon, was weirdly charming to the London crowd. That night after they had finished dancing in the hall, Lady Margaret remarked to her friend that she had not believed it possible for her Jean to become more beautiful, but the climate had certainly done wonders for her color and the brightness of her eyes. Janice retorted that the mountain air had given Lady Margaret, herself, a high color, especially when the name of Lord Ballerton was mentioned.

CHAPTER VI

HIGH BINDON COMES TO NEVIS

THE days and nights slipped by like alternate golden and smoky pearls on a silver strand. To all the little world of the Island it became evident that four young people were enclosed in an iridescent bubble of enchantment through which they saw all others as shadows walking. Sir John realized that he had lost the lovely Janice who had been invited out for the season that she might heal the scar of his widowhood. He was not a vindictive man, as the Duke of Allenway certainly was, but he did not have a very friendly feeling for Monsieur Severg. He remained away from social affairs; and if Lady Margaret had not been so occupied with her own happiness, she would have been troubled at the time her brother spent drinking with his old friend, his Grace of Allenway.

As another month went peacefully by and nothing came of Sir John's proclamation of a reward for pirates, Monsieur Severg found his uneasiness disappearing. Laffery had a cargo and was planning to sail for England, having agreed to undertake a mission to High Bindon.

Monsieur Severg had planned a dinner party for the night of the full moon. It was to be for the purpose of making official announcement of the double betrothal. The two young women, accompanied by Ballerton, had come early to Chateau Rien. Janice, as usual, wished to make the climb to the mountain top, while Lady Margaret elected the quieter pleasure of a *tête-a-tête* in the coolness of the hall.

The first view from the stone seat showed to the climbers a ship under full sail making for the harbor of Jamestown.

"It's the *Loyal Friend,*" said Janice. "I had forgot she was due to-day. I have an odd feeling as I watch her, Ronald. Do you see a shadow about her, as if a cloud accompanied her?"

"There is no cloud for me since she is not coming to take you away." The tone was light.

"I have an oppressive feeling here," the girl's hands were pressed to her breast. "I have felt it all day, as if trouble were approaching."

"Hurricane weather, dear. Dependence Ellery was saying so this morning. He can always foretell a storm twenty-four hours ahead. We'll likely have a blow; the sun has a glassy look and the water is like oil."

"Storms can be pretty bad at times here, they tell me."

Severg regaled her with some stories of the terrible winds that had swept over the islands and which he had encountered on the sea. Perhaps these tales added to her apprehension, for she seemed distrait enough even after they had returned to the house. The wind died entirely and the heat became oppressive as evening came on.

When Janice came down the great stairway to meet her lover that night before the guests had begun to arrive, he lifted her hands to his lips and murmured, "Pearl maiden!"

She was dressed in white satin, with lace like the frost patterns on northern pools. The heat had robbed her face of its tea rose bloom so that it was pearl-like under the black wing of her hair.

"Come with me, Lady of my heart. I have treasured for many years a gift that by right of royal fitness you must have now."

In the little study under the stairway, dimly lighted now with waxen tapers, the Luck lay curled on a silken pillow. He lifted his sleepy head and wagged his tail but did not come running as usual at his master's entrance. The great macaw opened an eye and regarded them obliquely as he scratched his beak, making a discontented grumbling remark.

In the stone wall directly behind the model

of a frigate under full sail, Monsieur Severg discovered a niche where reposed a silver casket. He placed it on the shining surface of the table where a silver candelabrum reflected itself and cast shimmering gleams on the lady's white gown.

Within the casket, on a bed of amethyst velvet, lay the soft fire-filled pearls of La Margarita. Strand on strand of loveliness that caressed the fingers that handled them.

"Oh! Oh!" The color flooded back into the girl's face, though words failed to express her marveling over the sea's beauty offered to her.

"Dream jewels, Ronald; each pearl a dream come true. Such fairy beauty cannot be for mortals."

"Then you are not mortal, as I have long suspected, Jean, my love. You will vanish some day like the fog from the mountain, like the dream when one awakes and cannot grasp the departing vision. I often have a feeling that our happiness is a figment of my brain, as unsubstantial as yonder moonlight of which you and the pearls and my dreams are woven. Anyway you are one now, you and the pearls." He placed the longest rope of pearls about her neck, no less satiny smooth than they. He held her hands and drank her beauty, her sweet eyes, her wistful, tender mouth!

Then, as they sat in the doorway looking into the white mystery of the distant sea, where they could discern the lights of the *Loyal Friend,* riding at anchor, Ronald told Janice the story of the pearls of Margarita. Her eyes were wide and her breath came pantingly when Jem and Waunica, Don Mateo and Rosita came alive for her. The *Azure Rood,* encrusted now with shells in a distant harbor, became a part of her, too. Her warm tears fell on his hands that clasped her own when she heard how the vindictive hand of Rosita had shattered his world for him.

Neither of them heard the little racking cough from the couch, though the pink macaw cocked his head at the sound, but when, at the sound of arriving carriages, they were recalled to social duties and rose to go to the hall they found the little old spaniel stretched limp and dead on his silken cushion.

"Luck, old Luck! the Luck of the *Rood!*"

The man's voice was husky and the girl wept afresh, for had she not just learned through how many perils and griefs the little dog had companioned her knight?

Dependence Ellery appeared at the door of the little room in search of Monsieur Severg. A messenger had come in urgent haste from His Excellency, the Governor, asking the immediate attend-

ance of Monsieur Lanor Severg for business of pressing importance. The eyes of Ellery met those of Severg insistently.

"You may speak, Ellery, before Lady Janice. I would trust my life in her hands and she knows all of it, now."

"Will you go over the mountain, sir, and let me send Laffery there for you? I fear this business."

"No, I shall not run away. I shall live now in honor and fearlessly—or not any longer at all, Ellery." Then Ronald Greaves achieved his finest laugh.

"Mayhap we borrow trouble. 'Tis likely we do. You shall come with me, Ellery, so as to bring word at once to Lady Janice. She is your mistress, now. Obey her as you would me, and care for her, man. Get my riding horse."

When Ellery had left, Ronald turned to Janice. "The guests will be arriving, soon. You must meet them in my stead. Say to them that I have been called to Jamestown on—on unexpected business. If I am delayed, I know I can trust you to handle the situation."

The parting would have been grievous had not Lady Janice been schooled from childhood in self-restraint and understanding. She smothered her quaking fears and smiled as gallantly as Sir Ronald, himself, who had laughed through a life

filled to the brim with hardships and grief.

The fog had begun to settle thickly over the Island as Monsieur rode down to Jamestown with Ellery and the Governor's messenger. Carriages on the way to the mansion gleamed through the fog as linkboys waved torches in an effort to see the roadway.

When Severg alighted before the executive mansion he smiled at the sight of a company of a dozen soldiers from the fort who stood drawn up before the door.

"Will ye stick your head in the lion's mouth, sir?" Ellery's whisper was a prayer.

"You may return, now. There is no need for you to come. For myself there is no way to go but forward."

"Sir!"

"So, Ellery? I thought so. Come with me then until the die be cast, then carry word to her as I told you." The tone of Monsieur was as light and unflurried as if he were about to engage in his usual evening game of cards. He settled his plumed hat and with hand on the hilt of his silver-mounted Toledo sword marched deliberately into the lighted chamber where Sir John Hamilton, who represented the high, the low, and the middle justice in the Island of Nevis, awaited him.

Lounging beside Sir John was the Duke of

Allenway, who had become almost inseparable with his Excellency during the past two months.

Severg, with eyes now alert for signs, found himself startled at the changed appearance of the Governor. He had aged perceptibly and the heavy flush of his face was a dangerous symptom in the tropics. The only other person in the room beside the messenger, who had followed behind Monsieur Severg showing that he was, in reality, a guard, was a heavy, white-haired man in ecclesiastical garb, who sharply eyed the slim handsome figure of Monsieur Severg.

Sir John did not waste any courtesy of welcome upon his successful rival.

"This gentleman has come from Scotland in search of the missing heir of High Bindon, Sir Ronald Greaves. Mr. Ralph Glendenning, do you recognize this man as the one you seek?"

Monsieur met the eyes of the pastor of the church of High Bindon. His bow to the churchman was deep and courteous. His words to Sir John were sharp.

"Why did Sir Hamilton think to find the heir of High Bindon in the person of the planter of Nevis?"

"That you will know soon enough, sir. Mr. Glendenning?"

The priest looked puzzled. He searched the

face of Monsieur as if questioning his soul.

"You need not fear to state your recognition, Mr. Glendenning. I am Sir Ronald Greaves. You are sure of that, are you not?"

"Personally, yes. You are the image of your father when he marched to fight for his King. The official test that I have given to Sir John to prove your heirship is that you can tell me where you last looked upon my face."

"In the secret chamber under the great hall at High Bindon. I had conducted you there, sir, when the soldiers of Cromwell were marching to the castle."

Sir Ronald's tone was pleasant and not disturbed. Glendenning seemed relieved, even happy.

"You see, Sir John, the lad knows. He saved me at the terrible cost of his own life. Lad! lad! Had I known, would I have permitted you to suffer in my stead? You will come home now to your mother, who lives but in the thought of you. If this last search had failed, I fear her thin hold on life would have snapped."

Sir Ronald's face was pale, now. Drops stood upon his brow. Mention of this loved mother touched a weak spot in his self-control.

"How was your search directed to Nevis, Glendenning?" His tone was low, urgent.

Sir John nodded to the guard, who flung open

a door behind Sir John. The Captain of the *Loyal Friend* came into the room. His narrowed eyes gleamed upon Sir Ronald.

"You are satisfied, I see, Mr. Glendenning. Will you pay me now the reward promised by Lady Joan Greaves for information leading to the discovery of her son?"

"Gladly, Captain Baldwin. I have it ready for you. She will be the happiest woman on earth."

Sir Ronald Greaves stood looking at the newcomer as if turned to stone. It was necessary that he hold this rigidity lest he kill the man instantly for this treachery to Lady Joan.

Mr. Glendenning drew from his pocket a bag that clinked softly. The Captain did not stop to count his money. He turned to Sir John Hamilton. His words were shrill with triumph, gratified hate, that had become a mania, and other unpleasant emotions.

"Now, sir, I claim from you the reward of one thousand pounds posted for the capture of the notorious pirate, Captain Redlegs. I identify Sir Ronald Greaves as that pirate."

The amazement of Glendenning held him silent. It must be said for Sir John that his flush deepened as he realized the evil quality of this betrayer. Still, there was a gleam of gratification at finding himself with full power over one who had snatched

a sweet morsel from his very lips. His degeneration of character had been very rapid.

"Ronald, my lad!" The clergyman had risen and his great voice was raised in a shout of anguish. "Deny it, boy!"

"Unfortunately for you, old monk, this man is the kind of a fool that will not lie," Captain Baldwin said. "He cannot deny the facts I present. I sold him in Barbados to Mr. Penne. He escaped from that island on the very night Broad Bart Archer looted Bridgetown. Three years later Archer captured my ship and burned it. This redleg was with Bart, one of his crew, when I was a captive. Redleg—escaped slave, the word means. When Archer's ship became his, he renamed it the *Azure Rood* and its list of captured ships and towns was long. Do you deny these facts, Sir Ronald Greaves?"

Monsieur's reply was spoken to the governor; the Tiger was ignored. "I was captain of the *Azure Rood* and was known as Redlegs. Glendenning has told you, Sir John, that I was punished for my family's loyalty to the Stuarts. I was a forced pirate, and have done no more in the way of buccaneering than Sir Francis Drake was knighted for doing. None can say I have ever violated a law of civilized warfare. I believe the King will show clemency to me."

"Clemency to a pirate!" Baldwin exclaimed. "I claim your promise, Sir John; your promise of immediate death for him and your reward for me. Ha! Ha! little Laird!"

"Hush!" Sir John drew a bag of gold from a drawer and flung it to the informer. "Get out!"

"Nay, sir, you promised I should see him die!"

"Die! Why, you Judas! What's piracy to such villainy as thine?" Mr. Glendenning forgot he was a man of God and remembered only his fighting days.

"He belongs to me, Mr. Glendenning." The tone was that of Redlegs, the pirate, light, insouciant, over a deadly hardness. He drew the fine Spanish sword he wore. "I am too tall for you to trample, now, Tiger man. I'll honor you with death by my blade."

"You will not." The Tiger drew and leveled a pistol from his vantage behind Sir John's table. "I had hoped to see you die in the gaol yard on the gibbet, but I am willing to send you to hell myself." The tones were gloating. This man had waited for twenty years for vengeance for a hurt to his pride.

Sir Ronald laughed in the evil face, even as a helpless boy had laughed those long years before on the deck of the *Friend's Adventure*. Ronald laughed at an ironic fate, for he remembered that

he would have recognized the Tiger on the first arrival of the *Loyal Friend* if heart and mind had not been filled with the beauty of Lady Janice. Love had played him this trick.

The madman fairly glared at the sound of that laugh; his finger curled about the trigger. A sudden movement from the churchman drew his eyes from the Laird for a moment. He laughed mockingly in Glendenning's face. "I have the last laugh, Sir Priest."

He had the last laugh, indeed. A shot rang out. The hate in Tiger Baldwin's eyes turned into an odd amazement. His gun exploded, but the ball whizzed past Sir John's head and buried itself in the polished table just as Tiger Baldwin, Captain of the *Loyal Friend,* crumpled to his knees with the clergyman's bullet in his heart.

"I am but the hand of God, Ronald. No man can live and trample on the heart of Lady Joan. Now, Sir John, we can take up this matter with the King, God bless him!"

But the affair was not so simple. When the confusion was over, Glendenning and Greaves disarmed, Sir John was found to be stubbornly set as only a narrow-minded man can be.

"Mr. Glendenning," he said, after a moment's consultation with Allenway, "you may as well understand at once that the death of this informer

does not change the issue for Sir Ronald Greaves, pirate, destroyer of the peaceful merchant ships of King Charles of England. I have been especially commissioned to rid these seas of these vermin. There is nothing you can say that will change my decision. You, yourself, sir, may find that the murder of Captain Baldwin may be serious. This pirate shall die at sunrise. I grant you permission to prepare him for death. I will set you free, for the present, nothing else."

"Now, by God's Rood, this is a travesty of justice for which you shall suffer, Sir John Hamilton, when I reach England—"

"If you do," interrupted the Governor. "You, yourself, are at my mercy, remember that, Mister Glendenning."

"For the sake of—"

"Peace, Ralph! I cannot have anyone plead for my life. Sir John has doubtless his own reasons for the brand of justice he administers. His advisor is well chosen. 'Tis a great pity, in sooth, to see the downfall of an English gentleman. There are worse things, Ralph, than to die a comrade of the sea; they are men, those comrades."

It is possible that if Mr. Glendenning had not been disarmed after the death of the Tiger, that militant priest might have attempted to coerce

his Excellency. After a time Glendenning realized that there is little use reasoning with a stubborn man—and none at all when that man has stultified all his better nature by the heavy drinking of strong liquors in a hot climate.

"Die the popinjay shall!" blurted Sir John finally. "You may stay and give him ghostly comfort, or leave—as you choose. I shall not leave this room until he be dead."

Ronald Greaves turned to his boyhood friend and teacher.

"Dear Ralph, I beg that you will go with my man and do an errand of mercy for me. Do not grieve over this ending. I cannot speak of the one who waits for me at High Bindon. You understand all I would have you say to her. No man can live forever, and at least I have lived, Ralph. Please go with my man."

As he marched in the midst of the guard from the house to be conducted to the gaol in the fort, Ronald spoke only one sentence to Ellery. "Do not tell her until morning."

With his plumed hat properly angled, his lace ruffles carefully adjusted, Monsieur Lanor Severg walked out of the world of Jamestown, for this was the night of April the eighth, in the year of Our Lord sixteen hundred and eighty, the last night that old Jamestown was to see.

CHAPTER VII

DELIVERED FROM THE PIT

THE gaol in the fort of old Jamestown was a hollow in solid rock of which a ledge formed the back of the fort. One tiny window above the rock gave a glimpse of the sky and the point of the mountain top. Three of the walls were of this rock ledge, the fourth was a wall of the fort.

Ronald Greaves, oddly incongruous in his white satin suit, laced with silver, the grand dress in which he had expected to announce his greatest triumph to Jamestown's social world, paced the narrow confines of this rock cell. What despair must have filled his soul as he sat in the ruins of the life that he had for the third time pieced together from the bit things about him. Did he feel the same panic that had torn the soul of the boy, years agone, in the hold of the *Friend's Adventure,* when the trap had first closed upon him? Did he feel, with his beloved master poet, that 'life is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing'? Whatever may have been his agony he was recalled from it by the necessity for serving another.

The bar rattled on his door of heavy four inch English oak. He wondered if it were possible that his mind had been so numbed by misery that the hour before dawn had arrived. He glanced from the tiny window. The wind had risen, and the fog had been blown from the island. The moon, ghastly somehow in its glaucous whiteness like an old corpse, hung behind the mountain.

Something white gleamed in the opening doorway. A cry that made his numbed heart leap, and Janice Carlysle was in his arms. The door slammed shut. Sweet as a garden of flowers, tender, broken with grief and pity, she lay spent for many moments with his broken words of endearment reviving her heart. He had braced himself not to see her again. He must now meet this harder task of helping her endure the end, she who had come to him clothed in beauty like the tropic night.

"I told Ellery—" he began at last.

"Yes, I know you told Ellery," her tone was scornful. "And did you think I would not have it out of him and that parson? I sent them to get your pirate men and that boat over in St. Kitts while I came here to get you free."

Ronald laughed as he had never thought to do again, a laugh of pure joy at the gallant spirit of her. "Sir John—"

She gave a sound that in another might have been a snort of derision. "Bother Sir John! Would any sensible woman attempt to move him? I came straight to the fort. The captain's a handsome youth who smiled timidly at me once or twice when I came here with Sir John. Could he refuse me, think you, when I prayed him for but an hour with you in your cell? He has sent the guard away and himself is watching your door. Now! When the moon sets, your pirates will be close off the point of the ledge. We must contrive to meet them."

"Sit by me, little Jean. Let us talk of dreams for a while; they are the only reality, beloved. What is life, that for it I should send your handsome young captain to disgrace and death for helping me? Have you considered what my life would be, a fugitive, a coward? Let me lose myself in the secret garden of your face, dear heart, and find all my flowers of love in bloom."

"That is nonsense!" The efficient Janice remonstrated, but she yielded for the moment to the poignant longing in her lover's voice. For a long time their soft converse was of days long past when an eager boy had ridden over the border hills with a song on his lips. High Bindon, with its secret chamber beneath the great fireplace, where a fugitive of the church militant lay

hidden while a dark-eyed woman sacrificed herself and her son out of loyalty to a friend, became as real to Janice as it was after all these long years still clear to the heart of him who, as Captain Redlegs, was condemned to die when sunrise next shone on the mountain peak.

Janice had been sitting with her head on her lover's heart, her eyes fixed on the square of light that was the barred window.

She caught Ronald's shoulders now in a grip of panic. "I am frightened! What is this terrible thing?"

Ronald roused himself. The wind had become furious, tearing at their window, but that was not the terror that shook Janice. He felt it now and was appalled by it. The feeling was of being in the heart of a noise so tremendous that the ears could not hear it. The sense of helplessness in the heart of a roaring chaos was overpowering. The roar, inaudible because of its enormity, seemed to center in the depths of the world. Now a horrible nausea overcame them both, though Ronald had ridden through storms at sea when his vessel had been blown flat on the waves.

"Look!" Janice, held in his arms as he reeled against the wall, pointed at the window. The mountain peak was swinging across the sky like a great pendulum.

"Earthquake!" Ronald's shout was but a whisper in her ear. In naming the awful convulsion he robbed it of half its horror for himself. His mind reacted from its mad fear of the unknown. The oscillations became more intense, shorter in length as waves increase in power at the center of a whirlpool. The sense of uproar was increased by the sounds of nearby crushing. Houses of solid stone were shaking into piles of loose flung rubble, but this surface noise was but the emphasis to the mighty tumult that underlay the whole cataclysm.

Ronald, with Janice in his arms, was thrown down on the oak bench. For support he grasped a rod of iron which was imbedded in the rock. The most terrible sensation he was aware of in this dreadful numbing of the ordinary faculties was that of being entrapped in this rock prison. That they were to die he was quite certain, and death in this elemental catastrophe seemed a trivial thing. Still, to be in the open under the blue arch one knew, was the death for a man.

Janice, he thought, had swooned from sheer terror. His own mind, though numbed as far as personal thought or action was concerned, still seemed curiously alert as if he were breathing in some strange rarefied atmosphere that speeded up thought while it stilled sensation. He was aware

now that the titanic uproar was due to the rending of the solid earth itself. It was as if the whole island were but a toy in the hand of a Gargantuan child who shook it as one might a rattle.

A suffocating odor permeated his cell. His mind associated it with battle, the smell of the deck of a ship when the great guns were crashing broadsides. Gunpowder and sulphur! They would die of asphyxiation in this hole. The grinding became unbearably near. His eyes fastened upon the roof of the cell, the corner where the wall of the fort joined the rock. A great crack was widening there.

Whether moments or hours had passed he could not tell. Now he felt a moment's cessation in the undulations. Blackness had succeeded to the moonlight at the window. The wavering taper on the wall sputtered out.

Ronald became aware that Janice was stirring in his arms. Her hands reached up in the dark and felt of his face.

"Can you swim, beloved?" His lips were at her ear.

"Oh, yes! What will happen? Shall we die here? Can't we shout to the captain to let us out?"

"We have only minutes to live, I think, and the captain is probably dead."

So he was, killed by an iron fixture that had

fallen on his head at the first convulsion of the earth. Now the fort was sliding from the ledge as the whole shore line, with the city of Jamestown, sank into the sea within eight minutes from the beginning of that frightful earthquake.

"Strip off your skirts, Janice. If we are caught by the sea 'twill be easier than to feel tied. Do not fear, for I shall not loose my hold, even in death, Janice. We shall go together. But we'll do our best to be ready."

It was his quiet, reasonable tone that restored her. Before the next undulation reached them, tearing the fort's wall from the cave in the solid rock where they were sheltered, she was again clinging to him, both of them stripped for swimming if necessary. He was tearing her satin skirts into strips, knotting them into a rope to bind her to him.

As a wall of water swirled into the cell, sweeping them out as if they were specks of trash in a corner, Sir Ronald clasped Janice to him with one arm, the other instinctively clinging to the oak bench, the only thing he could clutch. Ronald knew nothing then for a long time. The air beat upon his face occasionally, but so fierce was the torrential downpour from the hurricane driven clouds that drowning above the sea was almost as certain as below its surface. The very uncon-

sciousness into which they were beaten probably saved them from filling their lungs with salt water. Then, too, the receding wave had carried them out from the land so that the debris from the drowned city did not grind them into pulp.

They had swum, or drifted, or been driven by the hurtling wind to a great distance from the stricken Island of Nevis. The enormous tidal wave that followed the earthquake and completed the damage the latter had begun, no longer affected them. On the surface of the sea, beaten flat as with flails by the downpour from above, they drifted, clinging with the desperate grip of the drowning to the frail raft of the oak gaol bench.

CHAPTER VIII

THE "ROSE OF GALWAY"

THE *Rose of Galway* had been lying for two months in the harbor of St. Kitts while a miscellaneous cargo was slowly collected. On the night of the earthquake the crew had been called in, for the *Rose* was to sail on the morning tide. The men, sodden with the oppressive heat, lay on the deck forward. Captain Peter Laffery and his mate grumbled on the quarter-deck.

"Ellery would know to a minute when this shindy was a-going to break. Do you remember, Charles, the blow that bust on us outside Tortuga in the old *Bloody Jane?* Dependence smelled the danged thing for a whole day and night beforehand. He'd a nose for hurricanes, old Ellery."

"Wish he'd come and tell us whether to start now or wait it out in harbor. If she's a landward wind, ourselves will be safer outside, I'm thinking."

There was no question in the mind of either of the old seafarers that a storm of magnitude was imminent. The queer calm that is produced by the vacuum preceding a hurricane could never be

mistaken by those who had spent years in the great belt of storms.

"Not that I am easy in my mind about leaving himself here and that notice posted over in Jamestown. There's something keeping him here more'n just his cane fields. He longs for the north, I could tell that." Laffery was reluctantly obeying word received a few days before. Severg, to them still Captain Redlegs, had reported that no immediate danger seemed to threaten and they might sail at once.

"His luck 'ull hold good. Did anybody ever see him fail in anything he tried?" Ivemay felt that his own luck had turned with his separation from the captain.

Laffery leaned forward, piercing the purple night with his sharp seaman eyes.

"There's the flare. Watch, Charles!" He sprang to his feet, pulling up his fat comrade. " 'Tis the three full circles that Ellery was to show. Run, get up the sails, man. Send Pierre and Francoise to take me in the gig. Thank all the lucky saints I did not go with the ebb. St. Peter will get two tall candles when I come again to Galway. Quick, Charles, 'tis twice repeated. Be ready to make sail the moment I get the word."

As Laffery's gig touched the side of the *Rose* half an hour later the anchor came over the side

and under her light tops the ship slipped from the moorage.

Ellery's message had brought the greatest consternation to the old comrades of Redlegs.

"Himself's to die at sunrise! May the powers of darkness blast the Governor that gives a gallant gentleman to the gibbet." Charles Ivemay's tone was as solemn as if he had been in a pulpit.

A deep voice from the stranger who had climbed the ladder behind Dependence Ellery answered unexpectedly, "Amen and amen!"

Charles turned his head at a sharp angle and looked at the stranger. "Who's him, Ellery?"

"He's an orthodox parson. He tells the truth with his amen, too. All the powers of darkness are out this night, Peter. Run straight out to the east, safe from the islands, then strip to bare ropes. Feel that wind? It's coming! Smell the sulphur, Peter!"

At Ellery's advice the sails were dropped to catch the first breeze, and an hour later the *Rose*, stripped to gossamers that hummed like harps in the rising wind, rode before the freshening storm. The hurricane they encountered beat upon the staunch little *Rose* in vain. She could be harmed no more than a duck or a gull. The subterranean upheaval was not felt out on the sea but the salt downpour brought the Reverend Ralph Glenden-

ning into awed communication with his Maker.

" 'Tis God Himself lifting the waters of the sea in His mighty hand and hurling them back at the wickedness of Jamestown." Glendenning was more impressed with the terrors of the sea than the old companions, but Laffery expressed himself as happy that they had with them in this stress one so qualified to implore divine assistance in keeping to the tryst the captain had proposed.

"It did bother me some to see how to get back in the teeth of this wind by sunrise, but maybe the parson can arrange it." Laffery had always been religious.

"Thou hast been our help in all troubles." Ralph's great voice outrode the shrieking of the wind in the ropes. "Thou wilt never forsake the righteous nor suffer him to fall in any affliction. The widow and the orphan are Thy care and not a sparrow falls to the earth but Thou seest and carest for it. Oh, Thou God of the Waters, carry us safely through the storm and help us to bring succor to the innocent. We are Thy children and rest secure in Thy hand." Not once during the tumult did the old soldier's great voice cease from its supplication.

"Aye, he has the true fervor." Dependence Ellery found himself forced to this extravagance of admiration. "He holds to his job like a staunch

'un and I doubt not at all that God will listen to him."

"Aye, I feel sure you speak truth, Ellery," answered Captain Laffery, somewhat curtly. Laffery was one who put the burden of doing what was proper on the Lord without such a waste of breath. The parson's loud and continuous prayers from the quarter-deck, where he had stood clinging to the mizzen, had somewhat hampered Laffery's own orders. Toward dawn, as the wind abated, Laffery had got up some canvas and attempted to beat back to Nevis. Ellery had seemed to have faith that Lady Janice Carlysle might be able to get Captain Redlegs free from his prison and out on the point of the ledge before sunrise.

"We'll never make it, Peter. 'Tis dawn now and there's the mountain barely visible. Do you think maybe the hurricane will make them delay that hanging? Did Ellery tell you, Peter, the old Luck of the *Rood* died last night?"

"Now, Charles, don't be ignorant and trust too much to signs. A little dog, and him near twenty year old, can't be living forever. Don't you think that big parson is worth more than a little dog, now, Charles?"

"Have you been seeing all the stuff drifting in the sea?" It was Dependence Ellery who interrupted them. "I am thinking, Peter, that the folks

on the island will have been too busy with keeping their roofs from falling on their heads to attend any hanging this morning. Look! Yon's a body on a board! Pull her aback, man!"

"Now by the Rood, no! I'll stop now for no dead floater. I'm for meeting himself and am late already. A boat could not live in those waves."

"Sir Ronald Greaves is not the man who would leave a brother to his fate in the sea, Captain. Unless you succor the helpless, how can you expect God to aid us in our efforts? Put over a boat and I'll pull myself." That was Glendenning.

"Aye, Peter; himself would say that." Ellery agreed with the churchman.

"You'd risk your life in a small boat in such a sea?" Laffery challenged.

"I would," Glendenning answered, simply. "God is ever with the merciful."

"By the Rood, I'll do it! You're a man, sir, as well as a parson. I'm thinking Redlegs himself would have had more luck wi' you along to do the prayin'!"

But still grumbling under his breath at losing headway, Laffery dropped a boat and manned her. Ellery, in charge, rowed to where a plank lifted and fell in the aftermath of the storm and the tidal wave that had swept the debris of sunken Jamestown out to sea.

When two limp bodies were laid on the deck of the *Rose,* Peter Laffery and Charles Ivemay, old pirates, fell to their knees in pity, horror and utter thankfulness that they had not run heedlessly past their old leader in his hour of supreme need.

" 'Tis himself, God pity him, drowned by a sea maiden," whispered Charles Ivemay, his fingers moving as one who tells his beads.

"It's Sir Ronald Greaves, Laird of High Bindon, and his lady," Mr. Ralph Glendenning scornfully corrected, his hand on the heart of the unconscious man. "He's not dead yet, but he is like to die if somebody has not the sense to care for him and his brave lady."

At this the old companions sprang to life. Glendenning carried Lady Janice into the cabin. Wrapped in her long black hair, white as the pearls that, strand on strand, wrapped her slim neck, she might well have been a drowned mermaid. The churchman feared for a long while that there was no spark of life left in her wave-beaten body.

Sir Ronald was conscious and demanding word of her long before Ellery's assurances that she was alive and safe were by way of coming true. Finally, under Glendenning's persistent efforts, she gasped for breath, then turned to her side

and fell into a deep sleep like a weary child.

It was while the two were still unconscious that Peter Laffery, passing the harbor of Jamestown on his way to St. Kitts, discovered that Jamestown was no more. Bodily it had fallen into the sea. The ledge of rock where the Government buildings had stood was bare as a sea-bleached bone. The *Loyal Friend* had been lifted and set among the cane fields half a mile inland. Far up on the hillside the white stone mansion of Ronald Greaves seemed firm and intact. But Jamestown the gay, the gathering place of the wit and beauty of England and France, with its mineral springs, its assembly rooms, its palaces of the wealthy as well as its cabins of the lowly, lay beneath fathoms of sea water with all the residents who had not been able, in the very brief moments of warning, to flee to the higher ground back from the shore.

CHAPTER IX

HOMEWARD, HO!

WHEN Sir Ronald Greaves learned what a catastrophe had overwhelmed Jamestown, he urged Captain Laffery to place the *Rose of Galway* at the service of the survivors. All the shipping in the harbors, both large and small, had been damaged by hurricane or tidal wave. The *Rose* was the sole means of transport between the sister islands. Load after load of homeless, injured residents from Nevis were carried by Laffery to St. Kitts.

In the red evening light of that fatal day Lady Janice Carlysle stepped from a cart before the door of Monsieur Severg's mansion, dressed in a new straight calico gown and heavy shoes purchased from a cabin near the dock of St. Kitts. Over this bizarre costume hung a string of great pearls reaching to her waist. Lady Margaret Hamilton, who was pacing the terrace on the arm of Lord Ballerton, for a long moment stared at this amazing apparition without recognition. Then with a strangled cry she flew to clasp her friend in a convulsive embrace.

"Jeanie, Jeanie! I thought you were drowned with John and Bruce! Oh, that terrible night!"

"How did you two, of all the people in Jamestown, escape?" Lord Ballerton had grasped the master of the estate by the shoulders and was apparently trying by physical contact to assure himself that this person in the soiled duck trousers and collarless shirt could be the Island exquisite.

Janice met her lover's eyes. With Sir John and Bruce Beynon, Duke of Allenway, dead, there lived none who could connect the owner of Chateau Rien with Captain Redlegs—none save his three devoted comrades of the *Azure Rood.* And none lived who had witnessed the scene in the Governor's mansion save Ralph Glendenning. They were free to tell as much or as little as they chose.

"What on earth, Jean, made you go tearing away just before the storm? You would have been safe here. See, the windows were not even shattered."

It was true that Ronald's mansion had seemed to escape miraculously the effects of both earthquake and hurricane. This was perhaps due to Ellery's orders before he left for Jamestown at Lady Janice's demand. He had realized the imminence of the storm and had given the negroes directions to close the storm shutters. This had

prevented the winds rushing through the rooms to unroof the house. The effects of the quake had centered at the shore.

The story that Ronald told Lady Margaret and Lord Ballerton was rather sketchy. It omitted mention of Captain Baldwin altogether. It explained the coming of Glendenning and this made the presence of Lady Janice at the consultation seem desirable.

Their congratulations on the good luck of the restoration of his estates in Scotland covered much that might have roused curiosity. Janice said simply, "When the wave washed us out to sea we thought the end had come, Peggy. We didn't really know anything more till we were in the cabin of that little ship. I didn't wake up until afternoon. I am black and blue from head to foot, but—" here Lady Janice flushed brightly and looked at Sir Ronald under lowered lashes, "they said they could hardly loosen Ronald's arm from around me, though we were both apparently dead."

Lord Ballerton laughed. "That's the old saying about the Scot, you know; what he has, he keeps. And all the time, old man, I took you for a Frenchman. By Jove, but it's luck to have a winter estate on Nevis and a hunting castle in Scotland."

"I hate this island," Lady Margaret shuddered. "Always I would be remembering that graveyard beneath the sea. I want to go home to England, George."

"We will go, Margaret, on the first ship that will get us away." His tone was tender, possessive.

Sir Ronald offered a solution to the problem.

"Why not put aside festivities and have my friend, Ralph Glendenning, marry us quietly? The *Rose of Galway* would take us over to St. Croix where we could get a good ship for home. Could you stand it here, Margaret, for a week or two until the refugees have all been cared for? 'Twill be a sad bridal for you, I know. As for Janice and me, we never intend to be parted again."

The moon again hung serenely white like a gigantic replica of one of the pearls gleaming about the slim neck of Janice Carlysle. The candlelight gleamed from the tall windows across the terrace where the four sat. Below, no lights showed a city's happy evening festivities, only flickering torches where camps of homeless, broken families searched for lost ones. Margaret lamented the loss of friends who, at the approach of the storm, had left the mansion and hurried homeward, only to be caught in the ruins of their own shattered houses.

"I'm willing to hurry our wedding," she ad-

mitted. "I would love to have mine and Jeanie's together and neither of us have any close family to object to the breaking of conventions."

Sir Ronald's one desire was to hurry to the mother who was now counting the days until she could learn of the success of Ralph's mission. Lady Janice wished only what her lover desired. So it was arranged.

The mansion, like all the country estates, was opened to the survivors of the disaster who needed shelter. The young Comte D'Abancourt came from St. Kitts and assisted Ballerton and Sir Ronald in organizing the work of rescue and salvage, while Lady Margaret and her friend cared for injured and orphaned children. Mr. Ralph Glendenning was a tower of energy and helpfulness.

There came a morning when the most pressing needs of the community had been satisfied. It was a morning all blue and white and gold like the beauty of Margaret Hamilton. The great hall at Chateau Rien was made gay with garlands of tropical blooms. Small black boys had polished the shining floor till it mirrored the figures that traversed it. Every negro on the plantation was dressed in his gaudy best to stand on the green outside the big house and shout good luck to the beloved "M'sieu'" whom they had already learned to call the Laird, when he started with his bride

to that far-away place called England. True, many of them, with the ready emotionality of their race, would fall prostrate before his carriage and declare that they could not live with young massa gone away; but first they would be quite merry and happy at the big barbecue dinner under the trees.

The two brides had little choice of trousseau. Only two dresses were left to Lady Margaret, and but one to Lady Janice of all the London gowns she had brought out for the season. Janice had to wear as a bride the rose mousseline morning gown which she had worn to the mountain top on the day she had discovered her long lost blue cross knight. But when Sir Ronald met her on the landing of the great stairway and took her hand to lead her to the altar before the windows where Glendenning waited to make them one, his eyes declared that she was to him the pearl of women and the most beautiful thing the sun shone upon.

The beauty and wit and fashion of a famous watering place did not grace this wedding. Three old buccaneers, comrades of the sea, stood awkwardly in the great hall to watch Captain Redlegs marry Lady Janice Carlysle, the haughtiest beauty of London. They would never know that she was such a person, however, for to them she would always be the pearl maiden, washed up by the sea with himself on the great earthquake day.

That afternoon the *Rose of Galway* sailed away from the Island of Nevis. The water was blue and lavender and misty green above the dead city. The sky was azure and white above the mountain peak with its hovering veil of fog. The peak dwindled to a point on a purple blot unreal as a dream on the far horizon—unreal as the "little buckra massa," Captain Redlegs, Monsieur Lanor Severg.

"We are going home, Ronald; home to High Bindon after all the years of your dreaming. Come, awake, my dearest, and say you are happy." Janice had come softly to his side as he stood watching the last faint glimmer of the lovely isle.

"Home? My home, beloved, must still be where my dreams are—in the secret garden of your heart."

CHAPTER X

"HOME IS THE HUNTER"

IT was on horses that Sir Ronald Greaves and Lady Janice decided to ride from Carlisle to High Bindon. The ship had landed them at Morecambe Bay, where once the *Friend's Adventure* had sailed with a cargo of miserable humans barbadosed to satisfy a narrow bigot's idea of justice. They stayed the night at Carlisle Castle, now the seat of Janice's uncle. Ralph Glendenning had taken a ship for London. He did not intend that any future trouble should come to the old comrades of the Laird of High Bindon. The King, he was sure, would be only too glad to grant complete pardons to the pirates of the *Azure Rood* when the true facts of their complete reform were laid before him.

The sun shone gold on the cuckoo buds in the meadows; lark and mavis filled the air with carollings as two rode their horses toward the ford in the river. They skirted the oak grove where a ruined cottage stood. Ronald told the lovely lady who rode beside him on this June morning, the story of the tragic death of Jock Smith who had

once lived in the stone hut and how a boy had won the lifelong hate of Tiger Baldwin, the man who hated the unfortunate.

"One thing I must do at once, dearest, is to find Jem's old sweetheart, Margot Graeme. He was to have wed her at Michaelmas the year they sent him away. She will be one who will wait her lifetime out; no other maid would old Jem have chosen. She shall have his share of the treasure of Margarita. I have kept it separate from mine all these years. As for me—" Sir Ronald drew from his bosom a small blue cross, at sight of which his lady blushed and sighed.

"I feel like a boy again, little Janice, and if I sing and laugh as I ride do you remember this is my awakening from a twenty year nightmare."

Sir Ronald was dressed in a riding habit of green velvet. His turned up hat flaunted a red feather. How much he resembled Sir Hugh Greaves of High Bindon, whom he had watched ride to the wars with a laugh, a smile and gay scarf waved to his wife and two tall sons, long years ago, the young Laird did not realize until he turned down the hill that led to the Greaves' Manor. The square squat tower of the old Norman church at the end of the village street brought a lump to his throat and stopped the song that had lilted as he rode.

A bent grey haired man on the green before the church peered at the riders coming down the hill road. Suddenly he flung up his arms with a gasping cry that brought a young woman running to him from the cottage nearby.

"Ganther! Is't a stroke?"

" 'Tis Sir Hugh, the Laird, a ridin' hame frae the wars! Thank the good Lord, Bessie!" The old sexton bent stiff knees as Sir Ronald paused to say:

"Tell him, Bessie Grahame, 'tis the young Laird back from the Islands." Well he knew the news would fly from end to end of the village before he could ride the steep road to the gate of High Bindon Manor.

The gates stood open as he rode up to the court. The heavy doors were swung wide and old Bruce Byecroft, whiter of hair but straight and lean, stood bareheaded as he entered the great hall with Lady Janice by his side to meet Lady Joan.

She stood beneath the chimney shelf and watched as he came to her. Her hair was white, but the starry eyes of her were undimmed as they searched the face of the man who had left her a boy, unformed. She must have been satisfied with what she saw there, for she gave a soft cry and her eyes widened in joy as she opened her arms to her son who had come home as from the dead.